

Georges de Feure

1868 - 1943



Georges de Feure

The appeal of the Franco-Dutch artist, Georges de Feure, lies not only in the intrinsic quality of his Symbolist works, but also in the great diversity of his activities. This fascinating personality explored almost every branch of creative endeavour, ranging from painting to graphic art, the theatre to interior design, with even a fleeting excursion into the realm of aviation.

Published on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the artist's death, this first major study in English concentrates on the years 1890-1905. This corresponds to the crucial period between the publication of his first known work, a caricature in *Le Courrier français*, and the death of Siegfried Bing, his patron and proprietor of L'Art Nouveau, the Parisian gallery which gave its name to the international stylistic movement in the decorative arts.

During this period, de Feure rose from being an unknown, self-taught newcomer to the Paris scene to become a fashionable and highly sought-after poster designer as well as an acclaimed Symbolist with a reputation for his colourful and enigmatic visions. It was, however, with the revelation of his interior designs for L'Art Nouveau Bing at the 1900 Exposition universelle that de Feure shot to international fame.



Georges de Feure 1868 - 1943

The Crucial Years 1890 - 1905

Dans ses premiers tableaux, M. de Feure fut tellement sous l'influence de Baudelaire, qu'il se contenta le plus souvent de le paraphraser.

Henri Frantz

Le boudoir et le cabinet de toilette de M. Georges de Feure...caractérisent parfaitement l'esprit de la maison Bing.

Julius Meier-Graefe,
writing as G.M. Jacques

Georges de Feure

1868 - 1943

Ian Millman

19th-century Masters - 4

Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam

Waanders Uitgevers, Zwolle

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Preface

Exactly fifty years ago, on 26th November 1943, one of the major figures of the *fin de siècle* period in the fine and applied arts died in poverty in Paris; his name, or rather the pseudonym under which he had become famous, was Georges de Feure. His passing in the French capital on a late autumn Friday darkened by the German Occupation was hardly noticed. The only reference in the press to his death appeared on Monday 29th November when *Paris Soir* carried a short announcement paid for by his widow.

The next day, after a funeral service at the Saint-Jean-de-Montmartre church, the artist was buried in the Batignolles cemetery. There is no record of who attended or which personalities, if any, were present.

His tombstone, 'rediscovered' in 1980, bears a brief inscription which attests as much to the artist's French and Dutch origins as to both the duality and unity of private person and public artistic persona: G. Van Sluyters de Feure 1943.

Thus, a career spanning half a century came to an end with an indifference, if not silence, understandable in the context of the bleak circumstances of the time and the unfashionability into which the major artistic trends of the turn of the century had fallen.

While not wishing to undervalue the importance of de Feure's later career, with hindsight it is apparent that the most significant and appealing period of his life was the fifteen or so years from 1890 to 1905. This corresponds to the period between the publication of his first known work, a caricature in *Le Courrier français*, and the death of Siegfried Bing, his patron and proprietor of L'Art Nouveau, coincidentally on the artist's thirty-seventh birthday. During these crucial years, de Feure's name became inextricably linked with the avant-garde currents of Symbolism, the colour lithographic revolution in printmaking and the Poster Movement, Japonism and Art Nouveau.

Despite renewed interest in these movements, until now it has been difficult to appreciate the scope of de Feure's involvement in them and reassess his contribution largely as a result of the inaccessibility of his works to a wider audience.

The only retrospective of de Feure's painting, graphic and applied art in Holland was held at the Haagsche Kunstkring from 21st October to 9th November 1903. The visitor to that exhibition ninety years ago was able to contemplate a selection of works similar to those the present day visitor will see by this artist who so perfectly characterises the avant-garde concerns of the *fin de siècle* period at its best.

From Baudelaire to Bing

Aesthetic Orientations in the Symbolism and Art Nouveau of Georges de Feure

In the early years of this century, Louis Vauxcelles, the art critic who coined the terms Fauvism and Cubism, described Georges de Feure as *l'homme-orchestre* or the one-man band of contemporary art. The article appears to have remained unpublished and his description, unlike the other two, lost to posterity.¹

Why the article on an artist who had recently burst into the spotlight did not appear is unknown, but Vauxcelles may well have abandoned his text because of the comical, unflattering connotations of the expression. Rather than the image of a lone and pathetic figure struggling along with base drum, trumpet and any number of other musical instruments, vainly attempting to play them simultaneously, what Vauxcelles sought to evoke was the artist's multi-faceted talent and the variety of fields in which he had already excelled.

He then went on to say that he dared not, for no one would believe him, make a comparison between de Feure and the universal genius of Leonardo da Vinci. Vauxcelles was not the first to use this technique of overtly refusing to make a comparison with a Renaissance figure, Henri Frantz having done so with Michelangelo in an article published in *Le Figaro illustré* in February 1900.² In this way, the authors justly avoided criticism for making absurd and exaggerated claims, yet allowed, even invited the reader to view de Feure as a modern artist who was attempting to emulate his historical counterparts.

During the late 19th century, a whole generation of artists had emerged, figures such as Eugène Grasset, Henry van de Velde or Alphonse Mucha, who rejected the hierarchical division of the arts and insisted on their

equality. This philosophy of the synthesis of the arts led them not only to feel free to explore different fields of artistic expression, but indeed, to consider such an approach essential to broadening their artistic horizons.

Through his incessant exploration of virtually every area of artistic endeavour - newspaper and book illustration, poster and printmaking, drawing and painting as well as the decorative arts and interior design - de Feure personifies the 'universal artist' and the avant-garde aesthetic concerns of the *fin de siècle* period. Yet, while few of his contemporaries could match the breadth or scope of his contribution to the fine or applied arts, this largely self-taught artist pushed the concept to its logical conclusion, venturing into the realms of architecture, the theatre and even aviation in his quest to become a modern equivalent of the legendary figures of the Renaissance. However, behind this wide, almost bewildering diversity of activity, two principal axes of inspiration become apparent in the aesthetic orientation of de Feure during the crucial years of the turn of the century period: the inexhaustible richness of the poetry of Charles Baudelaire and the visionary ideas of Siegfried Bing.

Youth

Georges de Feure, whose real name was Georges Joseph van Sluyters, was born on 6th September 1868 at 196, avenue d'Eylau (today avenue Victor Hugo), an elegant but lively tree-lined thoroughfare in the fashionable 16th arrondissement of Paris descending from the Arc de Triomphe towards the Bois de Boulogne.³ He was the fourth of a family of six children and the last to be born in the French capital. His father, Jan Hendrik van Sluyters, was a Dutch architect from The Hague, while his mother, Charlotte Françoise Josephe Maréchal, was a Belgian from Liège.⁴

According to the editor and art critic Octave Uzanne who, by the time he published an article on the artist in *The Studio* in November 1897 had been a friend and collaborator of several years standing, de Feure's father was 'a rich and prosperous architect' who brought him up 'amidst every luxury'.⁵

Indeed, Jan Hendrik came from an influential and wealthy family, with parents who were sufficiently affluent and enlightened to make the most of their son's potential by sending him, at the age of eleven, to the Academie voor Beeldende Kunsten in The Hague and financing eleven years of study until his graduation as a

■ Fig. 1 Auguste Roedel
Caricature of de Feure
1892



qualified architect at the age of twenty-two.

Towards the end of the 1850's, Jan Hendrik was already established in Paris, attracted by the possibilities that the transformation of the city from a medieval town to a modern metropolis offered a young architect, and by the mid 1860's he was working independently and signing his own buildings. These were constructed for a largely aristocratic clientele of Counts and Barons in the select district bordering the Champs-Elysées to the north between the Parc Monceau and the Arc de Triomphe.⁶

Unfortunately, the Franco-Prussian War in 1870 brought this successful period to an abrupt end and the family fled Paris, arriving in The Hague by early September. During the next decade, circumstances forced the family to lead a nomadic existence, moving from town to town in Holland and Belgium according to where Jan Hendrik could find work. Although periods of work brought some respite, in general times were difficult. The birth of two more children did not help the family fortunes and they were twice subjected to financial humiliation: in 1872 when they suffered the ignominy of having all their possessions sold off in the street, and in 1881 when Jan Hendrik was declared bankrupt.⁷ Although, as Uzanne notes, their 'easy comfortable existence was changed in a moment into one of trouble and anxiety', Jan Hendrik seems to have been better prepared for a second financial upset and de Feure was able to remain at his Jesuit boarding school, the Pensionaat Sint Joseph in Hilversum, until 18th April 1883.⁸

Much uncertainty surrounds de Feure's activities during the second half of the 1880's, but it is not difficult to believe, as Uzanne put it, that he had 'all sorts of ups and downs'.⁹ It was probably the childhood experience of both extremes of the social scale, from almost aristocratic standing to destitution and public humiliation that led to his fierce belief in himself, having had to learn, like the rest of his family, how to survive, to keep his self-respect and have pride in what his family had been when there was nothing else.

According to the critic, de Feure, longing for independence, had left school at the age of fourteen. He was placed in a business house at Utrecht, but did not stay there long. He then worked successively as a clerk to a firm of forwarding agents at Dordrecht, assistant to a bookseller at The Hague and at a hatter's in Rotterdam before finally becoming 'a sort of wardrobe-keeper's assistant and "general utility" man in an Amsterdam theatre, where for fifteen florins a week the poor lad had to post the bills and clean the scenery during the day, and at night to play all sorts of parts in absurd operettas or comedies, in quality infinitely heavier and less subtle than the national Schiedam'.¹⁰ Uzanne was not the only writer to mention a period he spent with a theatre group as a youth; Frantz, for example, also refers to it while Vauxcelles went as far as saying that it was the Frascati d'Art, but as to exactly when and for how long de Feure was involved remains a mystery.¹¹

On 28th September 1886, shortly after his eighteenth birthday and Moréas' publication of his famous *Manifeste littéraire: le symbolisme* in the supplement to *Le Figaro*, de Feure passed the entrance examination to the Rijksacademie voor Beeldende Kunsten in Amsterdam.¹² He was, along with George Hendrik Breitner, one of the eleven students admitted, having received five out of six votes in his favour. The future Nabi, Jan Verkade, who also sat the examination, was on this occasion refused entry. At the time, de Feure said that he had been a student of the Ecole des Arts décoratifs in Paris, but as their archives have in part been destroyed, it is impossible to verify this claim. He was enrolled in evening classes at the Rijksacademie, which suggests that he was working, but two days later he left, probably for Paris, without having paid his fees. It was obvious that he was unsuited to academic training which he felt had nothing to offer him and never again did he take up formal artistic study. In contrast to many other young avant-garde artists of his generation like Toulouse-Lautrec, Emile Bernard and the future Nabis, he eschewed the various studios in Paris such as Cormon's and the Académie Julian where they gained experience, discussed theories and perfected their technique. De Feure admitted no master, but determined to forge his own independent path and, in Uzanne's words 'in everything to be indebted to no one but himself', as may be judged by the illustrations to *Le Rêve* by Emile Zola (cat. 78).¹³ Dating from the period 1888-1890 when de Feure was already in his early twenties, they reveal his aspirations as an artist but betray his lack of technical skill.

Montmartre

By the autumn of 1889, de Feure had settled in Montmartre, the hilly district to the north of Paris which had become the centre of bohemian artistic and literary life. For several years, he led such an existence, living on the impasse Rodier with his young mistress, Pauline Domec, who bore him two sons, Jean Corneille and Pierre Louis.¹⁴

He frequented the cafés-cabarets which were the natural haunts of painters, writers, musicians and poets, developing friendships and contacts in the artistic community, exchanging ideas and studying the mass of paintings, watercolours and drawings that decorated the walls. Among his favourite cafés during the early 1890's were the Nouvelle Athènes, Le Rat Mort and the 4Z'Arts where he became friendly with such artists as Henri-Gabriel Ibels, Abel Truchet and Adolphe Willette, but by far the most notable of those he frequented were Le Chat Noir and L'Ane Rouge (fig. 2), run by Rodolphe and Gabriel Salis respectively. Although de Feure never became involved in the Chat Noir's weekly newspaper, he did apparently contribute a play entitled *Le Cabinet magique* to its famous shadow theatre and also decorated L'Ane Rouge with 'very curious allegorical paintings'.¹⁵

■ Fig. 2

L'Ane Rouge, where de Feure exhibited his first works in the early 1890's



■ Fig. 3 Georges de Feure
Attendant l'Inspiration
photorelief
from *Le Courrier français*,
20th April 1890
private collection



Unfortunately, he did not escape the Salis brothers' rule of never paying artists and he had to make a 'gift' of his works in order to have them presented to the public on the walls of their cafés.¹⁶

He was also an habitué of the Auberge du Clou, next door to L'Ane Rouge on the avenue Trudaine where, together with Claude Debussy, Maurice Ravel and Erik Satie, he belonged to the group gathered around Marcellin Desboutin and his son, the playwright André Mycho. By the mid 1890's, de Feure shared the same address as Desboutin at 15, rue Bréda, while André Mycho lived with de Feure's youngest sister, Jeanne. De Feure and Mycho, together with his brothers Sibichou and Chiquine, would gather in the home of Abel Truchet, baptised 'Théâtre Caroline' for the occasion, and perform their own pantomimes and plays.¹⁷

De Feure made his public débüt as an artist with the publication of a caricature entitled *Attendant l'Inspiration* in *Le Courrier français* on 20th April 1890 (fig. 3). Until November 1893, his illustrations appeared intermittantly on the pages of this and other humoristic and popular literary journals such as *Fin de siècle* and *Le Messager français* as well as the more ephemeral *Le Boulevard* and *La Butte*. At first, his caricatures were summarily and rapidly executed in a style not dissimilar to that of Forain but he quickly evolved to a more finished manner that occasionally recalls Steinlen, but more frequently Heidbrinck, Lunel or Roedel. Apart from their intrinsic qualities, these newspaper illustrations are of particular interest as they were often straightforward reproductions of his early watercolours, made possible by the technical processes developed by Charles Gillot, and they allow his stylistic and thematic development from caricature to

Symbolism to be followed closely.

It was fairly common for artists to use elements from previous works in new situations, and during the early part of his career de Feure did the same. Although the practice may be condemned as a lack of originality, one can understand the desire of a young artist such as de Feure to exploit a pleasing design to the full after many hours of work perfecting it. Indeed, de Feure was considerably successful in using both figurative and floral motifs from one media to another and incorporating them in entirely different settings, varying their emotional and evocative significance according to the context. Works as diverse as the gouache *Le Cirque Corvi* (cat. 5), the oil panel *L'Abîme* (cat. 9), the lithographic print *L'Amour aveugle, l'amour sanglant* (cat. 70), the poster *Aux copains du diable au corps* (cat. 58) and the newspaper illustration *Kief* (cat. 77) are examples in different media of this re-utilisation of motifs that give insight into his working methods of the period as well as his thematic preoccupations.

The Emergence of Decadence

Two of the themes which would attain their fullest expression in de Feure's Symbolist art, namely the femme fatale and sapphic love, appear in embryonic form in these early works. In an article published in *La Plume* in September 1892, Léon Riotor provided the first serious analysis of de Feure's art and his vision of womankind. He noted that de Feure viewed the relationship between the sexes as antagonistic rather than complementary, contrasting a vision of woman as triumphant, cruel and disdainful with an image of man as faint-hearted and long suffering, fawning or cringing like an amorous serf or a dog on a leash.¹⁸ To underline symbolically their respective superiority and dominance, inferiority and servility, women were portrayed as rich and elegantly dressed while men were depicted as 'poor, worn-out, ragged, pathetic'. Riotor then described at length a watercolour exemplifying this representation of the sexes which is close in subject and spirit to such illustrations as *Félines: Charité* from *Le Courrier français* (cat. 76, fig. 4): 'It is cold and damp, the breeze whispers a hymn of despair, and the wretches are there, working in the mud, shabby and filthy, already ashamed of their lowly origins. They catch sight of some beautiful women, bedecked with feathers, silks and satins... Ah, they are not for us these finely dressed beauties. Who then are the lucky mortals who are allowed to undress them? ... And in a cloud of perfume these pretty women are beside them, and in their unconscious perversity they sense the timid desire of the ragged labourers. Let's be charitable they think, lifting their petticoats even higher. And thus it is, through this view of lace and coveted flesh, that they increase the suffering of these wretches while imagining that they are relieving it'.¹⁹ This representation of woman as a creature with an innate capacity for begetting trouble, wrecking havoc with almost child-like innocence, is one



■ Fig. 4, cat. 76 Georges de Feure
Charité
photorelief
from *Le Courrier français*,
10th July 1892
private collection



■ Fig. 5 Nadar
Charles Baudelaire
1855
photograph
Archives Photographiques, Paris

■ Fig. 6, cat. 57 Georges de Feure
Le Diablotin
1892
colour lithograph, 79.5 x 60 cm
private collection



■ Fig. 7, cat. 60 Georges de Feure
Camille Roman
1893-1894
colour lithograph, 131 x 94 cm
Musée de la Publicité, Paris



of the classic formulations of the femme fatale, the other being that of a deliberate wrong-doer who derives perverse satisfaction from inflicting harm and pain.

Both the femme fatale and the theme of sapphic love which predominate in de Feure's mature Symbolist work are directly inspired by the anti-feminism of Decadent aesthetics and derived in large part from Baudelaire (fig. 5). While his Symbolist representation of sapphic love can be traced to *Lesbos* and *Les Femmes damnées* in Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal*, the Pre-Symbolist treatment of the theme was largely inspired by the lesbian community in Montmartre, where women, often dressed in men's clothing, drinking in the cafés or dancing together in the music halls were a common sight. In *L'Art du rire et de la caricature*, published in 1892, Arsène Alexandre remarked that de Feure had been struck by the masculine character and dress of certain Montmartre women and that he had found a particularly elegant manner to portray their cattiness.²⁰ Although the women in *Promenade d'automne* (cat. 2) lack this manliness, the work is close in spirit to one described by Riotot in his article in *La Plume*: 'Farther on, a similar feeling, even more cruel. Some men among clods of earth, in the ground, in filthy rags, feel a heartbeat of pleasure at the sight of two pretty young women. These will not excite them any more than this by showing them their underwear, for they probably care little for men and their love. No. Looking at them with disdain, they will simply caress each other without restraint'.²¹ Thus, the Pre-Symbolist, caricatural approach to sapphism, like that of the femme fatale, has a social dimension in which sexuality is equated with class, together with a contrast or opposition between urban and rural environments. The sense of inferiority felt by men before these women is no longer based solely on the social distinctions which make them unattainable but also on their sexual preferences which it amuses them to openly display.

Posters and Prints

In addition to newspaper illustration, by middle to late 1892 de Feure was also designing posters and lithographic prints, mainly in colour. According to Edmond Sagot, the first and foremost of poster and print dealers in Paris, de Feure's early ventures in the medium were 'printed in very small number' but, by 1897, Uzanne was writing that the artist had produced more than one hundred colour lithographic designs.²² Like many other artists of his generation, de Feure had been attracted to colour lithography and its application to the poster and print by the potential it offered as a genuine new art form, characteristic of the turn of the century period. Once the necessary technical advances to put colour lithography within the scope of individual artists had been achieved by Jules Chéret, the appeal of the poster for the avant-garde was three-fold: firstly, commissions provided an important source of income for artists who had not achieved or did not seek success at the

Salon; secondly, colour lithography was virtually a new medium, a totally new art form whose technical possibilities invited exploration and innovation; and thirdly, the poster, by its very nature, was the perfect application of the philosophy of 'art in everything'.

In 1898, André Mellerio devoted a short paragraph to de Feure in *La Lithographie originale en couleurs* in which he noted that the artist had done a considerable amount of colour lithography, experimenting and working in different styles. Although there is such diversity in de Feure's lithographic prints that it is hardly an exaggeration to say that each has its individual style, three main groupings can be discerned. These are based on the artist's different working methods - rich drawing with lithographic crayon, outlining with finely pointed brush and spraying the surface with fine drops of ink, known as *crachis* - but they are often so dexterously combined in a single print that they become, as it were, a unified whole in which none of them dominates. This constant variation reflects his exploration of the medium as much as his search for the most appropriate visual expression of his ideas, but his lack of a consistent style may have been a disadvantage in a market where success was often based on remaining in the public eye by developing a personal, instantly recognisable manner and sticking to it.

In contrast to his lithographic prints which remain difficult to classify, de Feure's career as a poster designer may be divided into two distinct, but overlapping periods of creativity. Broadly speaking, the first of these spans the first half of the 1890's, during which period the artist accepted commissions from a wide variety of sources - newspapers and magazines, groceries, cafés-cabarets and even the circus - but above all from the café-concert which had become by far the most popular form of entertainment in the French capital in the last quarter of the 19th century.

The obvious influence of the work of Jules Chéret on the composition and colour structure of de Feure's café-concert posters underlies the suggestion that he was his pupil, but it seems unlikely that this was so.²³ Uzanne relates that de Feure had learnt the technique in 1890 before settling in Paris and thus presumably not from Chéret: 'First he worked for a lithographer, who did posters, and although free from actual want, he suffered tortures as a mere workman condemned to produce rubbish to order, stifled in an atmosphere of ugliness. However, he set to work obstinately and determinedly, to emancipate himself by the personal gifts he felt within him'.²⁴ In the French version of this article, published in *Le Monde moderne* in February 1898, Uzanne states that this apprenticeship took place in the 'pays des dunes et des canaux', which may partly explain why de Feure's very first poster, *Le Diablotin* (cat. 57, fig. 6) was for a Belgian publication. This poster clearly demonstrates the technical proficiency of de Feure as a lithographer well versed in the whole gamut of visual effects possible with the medium and provides a striking contrast with the

illustrations for Zola's *Le Rêve* (cat. 78) executed little more than two years earlier.

It is with the choice of colours and their disposition in such posters as *Européen - Genève, l'Horloge - Naya, Fonty* and *Camille Roman* (cat. 60, fig. 7) that the influence of Chéret on de Feure is most evident. Although his work certainly lacks the lightness and spontaneity of Chéret's and often fails to achieve the same deft suggestion of movement, his nervous line and the angular, almost naive style generate a lively sense of anticipation of an evening's unpretentious entertainment far removed from the stuffy pomposity of literary circles.

While the café-concert posters of his contemporaries such as Toulouse-Lautrec, Steinlen and Ibels ultimately transcend the category of advertising to take an important position in the history of modern artistic development, de Feure's café-concert posters, although original and stimulating, do lack a certain measure of innovation and experimentation in comparison. However, it is with his 'artistic' posters produced from around 1895 onwards that de Feure truly comes into his own, revealing himself to be one of the most talented designers of his generation. In these later works, his entire conception of the poster was transformed as he liberated himself from the constraints that the representation of stage artistes had imposed on his creative imagination.

Towards Symbolism

The transition to Symbolism in de Feure's art took place between the summer of 1892 and the spring of 1893, corresponding to the period during which he started to show his work in galleries and take part in exhibitions. His works were hung beside those of Gauguin and the Nabis in the Expositions des Peintres impressionnistes et symbolistes, presented by Le Barc de Boutteville at his gallery on the rue Peletier, and he also participated in the Sâr Péladan's infamous Salon de La Rose+Croix as well as the Salon des Cent organised by Léon Deschamps, editor of the progressive literary journal, *La Plume*. Indeed, of the four major promoters of avant-garde tendencies during the first half of the 1890's, it was only with the Galeries du Théâtre d'Application, commonly known as La Bodinière, and their exhibitions Les Peintres de l'âme that de Feure was not associated. This early period culminated in a personal exhibition, *Aquarelles par Georges de Feure*, at the Galerie des Artistes modernes from 12th to 24th March 1894 with an introduction to the catalogue by the Symbolist poet Paul Adam.²⁵

Le Barc de Boutteville had been the first of the established picture dealers to open the doors of his gallery to the younger generation of artists who had yet to make a name for themselves. Apparently, it was the painter Paul Vogler who had suggested the idea and, after having thought it over, he went about visiting artists such as Bonnard, Vuillard and Sérusier in their studios and the first of his Expositions des Peintres impressionnistes et symbolistes opened in late December 1891, some three

months before the first Salon de la Rose+Croix.²⁶ One can easily imagine the interest that Le Barc de Boutteville's policy had for a young artist like de Feure who had only been living in Paris for about two years and had never exhibited his work, except on the walls of the Chat Noir and L'Ane Rouge. Similarly, he was probably encouraged to participate in Péladan's Salons by his friend Marcellin Desboutin, who had painted the portrait of the Sâr in 1891, but de Feure's association with both series of exhibitions was brief. He refused to be aligned or affiliated with any grouping and, as soon as he felt that the general interest or quality of the presentations was declining, he no longer participated.²⁷

In pictorial Symbolism, the question of subject matter and its portrayal was crucial. Having appeared initially in literature before spreading to painting and music, Symbolism rejected the external world as one of mere appearance and illusion, claiming that ultimate reality was to be found in the inner universe of the mind. The problem was how to give form to this hidden world of the imagination. The poet could use sound, rhythm and verbal imagery to conjure emotional responses and give shape to ideas in the mind of the reader or listener. The painter, however, was faced with the daunting task of rendering visible this realm of feelings and sensations, of giving flesh to what the poet simply described with words. Following Baudelaire's theory of correspondences an artist could use, for example, colour to evoke a perfume or a taste and line to suggest a sound or musical note but, as much as allegory with its repertory of established signs and symbols, this practice risked becoming a regimented, codified system. Perhaps more importantly, as pictorial Symbolism was no longer dependent on the faithful depiction of external reality,

■ *Fig. 8 Paul Ranson
La Chambre bleue
1891
oil on canvas, 46 x 54 cm
private collection*



■ Fig. 9, cat. 3
Georges de Feure
Vision rouge
1892
gouache on paper
36 x 54 cm
Collection Victor Arwas,
London



some artists, such as de Feure or Nabis like Paul Ranson (fig. 8), took the idea further and sought a solution in a subjective, non-representational use of colour and line in which the decorative nature of the work fulfilled a more complex function. Indeed, it is worth noting that even when de Feure exhibited his paintings at the Salon de la Société nationale des Beaux-Arts he insisted on presenting them in the *objets d'art* section, thus negating any notion of their superiority over any other art form and emphasising, as in Aurier's famous definition of Symbolist painting, that they were, by their very nature, decorative objects.²⁸

In terms of subject matter, the essence of evocation and elusiveness in Symbolist poetry and particularly Mallarmé's dictum that 'to name an object is to suppress three quarters of the enjoyment to be found (in the poem) which consists in the pleasure of discovering things little by little: suggestion, that is the dream', motivated de Feure to strive to go beyond a static, one-dimensional depiction of a subject and create work that was enigmatic and ambiguous, open to a variety of emotional responses and interpretations. He drew on any material, ranging from the Bible and Greek mythology to the writings of Maeterlinck, Multatuli, Rodenbach, Marlowe and Shakespeare but above all Baudelaire, that could be visually adapted in his art, often synthesising these sources or combining them with elements of his own personal experience in order to give the work its autonomy and ultimate hermeticism.

In the context of the intellectual élitism of the Symbolist milieu to which de Feure aspired, the more obscure the work, the better; the 'Superiority of the Artist', like that of Baudelaire's Dandy, was only equalled by that of the happy few who could understand him. Despite being well versed in Symbolist literature and benefiting from the titles displayed next to his paintings in exhibitions, the critics confronted with giving an appreciation and analysis of de Feure's art often remained perplexed as to what exactly was being expressed. *Vision rouge* (cat. 3, fig. 9) is a case in point. When presented at the Troisième Exposition des Peintres impressionnistes et

symbolistes in late 1892, one critic remarked ironically that 'the subject is so clear and understandable that we believe it unnecessary to explain further'.²⁹ This problem of accessibility of meaning in de Feure's art, at the time when it was only the second exhibition in which he had participated, illustrates his affinity with and ambition to be part of the Symbolist milieu and his refusal to compromise these aspirations by seeking success from a larger public.

The Aquarelles par Georges de Feure exhibition was met with a similar response: a reviewer in *L'Art français* observed that de Feure was 'an artist whose work is never banal, but whose symbolism is not always accessible'.³⁰ He was, however, impressed by the use of colour which, for him, was enhanced by a 'true nobility of line'. As to the subject matter, he felt that 'perverse femininity, bitter scepticism and sometimes a grand dramatic flight characterise his disturbing creations'.³¹

Decadent Sensuality: Sapphic Love and the Femme Fatale

De Feure's fascination with this 'perverse femininity' reflects the currents of eroticism and anti-naturalism in the Decadent aesthetic which can ultimately be traced to the ideas expounded in Baudelaire's *Fusées* and *Mon cœur mis à nu* as much as certain poems from *Les Fleurs du mal*. The cynicism and élitism of Baudelaire's Dandy led to a position in which Nature, rather than being benign and benevolent, was construed as an abomination to which he was subjected, and the act of love debasing, being nothing more than blindly carrying out her dictates for the survival of the species. To escape the biological yoke of existence and the banality of everyday life, the Dandy held himself aloof from the outside world and voyaged inwards through the hidden universe of his own being and imagination. Not only did this result in narcissism, but also extreme boredom and the necessity to find distraction through new sensations, often obtained with the aid of drugs.³² It was while exploring these inner depths that they discovered the importance of sexuality. But, having discovered it, they then rejected it, or rather rejected it in its normal forms in so far as they belonged to the world of nature. Decadent eroticism sought to transcend mundane, natural impulses and prove the superiority of artifice through an unimpeded and elaborate exploration of sexual possibilities. If sexuality ultimately could not be denied, it could be transformed in the refined universe of the Dandy's mind into strange and exotic forms in the search for new sensations and the delectable shudder of excitement.

During the early Symbolist period, de Feure was almost exclusively preoccupied with the theme of sapphic love, and although there are occasional exceptions such as *Hypocrisie* (cat. 6) in which the Church appears to be the target of his 'bitter scepticism', even here such a dimension in the interpretation of the work cannot be totally ruled out.

In an atmosphere redolent of Baudelaire's *Lesbos* and *Les Femmes damnées*, de Feure explores the relationships between women themselves, without reference to men and masculinity, through oils and gouaches such as *L'Abîme* (cat. 9), *L'Eventail symboliste* (cat. 8) and *Dans la dune* (cat. 7) as well as lithographic prints such as *Fleurs de la grève* (cat. 68) and *L'Amour aveugle, l'amour sanglant* (cat. 70). However, it is perhaps the newspaper illustration *Kief!* (cat. 77, fig. 10) which characterises best the representation of the theme during this period.

Dating from May 1893, *Kief!* is also among the earliest of de Feure's works that associate the naked female figures drawn in outline and huge, sensual flowers which are characteristic of his first Symbolist manner. Stylistically, they employ a form of Synthetism derived from Charles Maurin's triptych *L'Aurore* (fig. 11) which had been exhibited the previous year at the first Salon de la Rose+Croix. The Nabi, Paul Ranson, was also making similar stylistic innovations during the same period. In *Kief!*, the exotic decadence of naked, hashish smoking lesbians is amplified by the voluptuous flower towering above them. It is when such images are compared with their Pre-Symbolist counterparts, such as *Promenade d'automne* (cat. 2) that the extent to which they have become overtly decorative and sensual is fully apparent. They demonstrate, even in black and white, as is the case with *Kief!*, de Feure's ability to give form and substance to what the Decadents dreamed. His huge, convoluted flowers are not a simple borrowing from the natural world but rather a deliberate distortion away from it. Each line and curve of the heavy-petaled flowers and their stems has been twisted and tortured by the artist until it writhes and pulsates with a life of its own and the eye is drawn into a whirlpool of erotic and almost hallucinatory forms. But it is above all with works where the emotional and evocative use of colour is brought into play that the sophistication and splendour of de Feure's Symbolist art is revealed to the full.

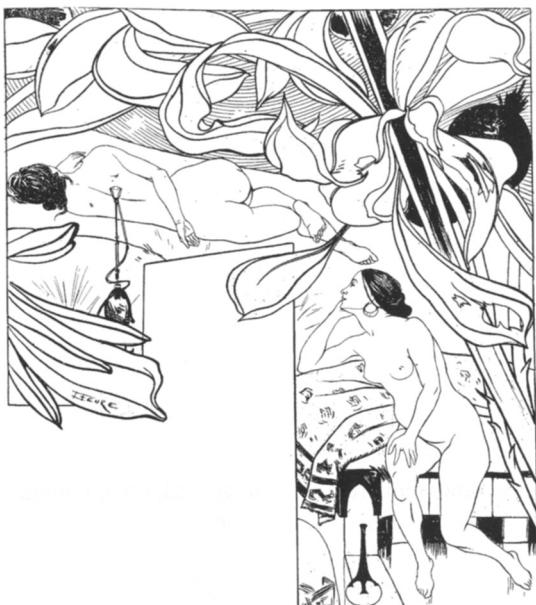
Such sensitivity to colour and its symbolic potential did not go unnoticed. Writing in May 1894, shortly after the Aquarelles par Georges de Feure exhibition at the Galerie des Artistes modernes, Camille Mauclair, while admitting that he had not liked the portraits by the artist that he had seen (probably those presented at Le Barc de Boutteville's gallery in an exhibition called *Portraits du prochain siècle*), now claimed that he was confronted 'at last by a man who takes notice of what a colour represents in itself, who places a violet next to a green because it has a special meaning'.³³ His succinct description of de Feure as 'un décorateur à idées' summarises perfectly the two principal objectives of de Feure's art: the creation of a work which functioned as decoration through its visual beauty and as an object of reflection through its philosophical and literary content.

It was with *La Course à l'abîme* (fig. 12), a magnificent summary of his view of humanity and the natural world that was the centre piece of the exhibition at the Galerie

des Artistes modernes, that de Feure's use of luxuriant plant forms to evoke an air of unreality and sensuality was taken to its logical conclusion with a riotous tangle of vegetation overwhelming most of the picture's surface. There was nowhere further for it to develop. Having fully exploited the possibilities of the association of small, naked female figures dominated by a mass of convoluted flowers, de Feure's Symbolism evolved into a second or 'high' Symbolist phase in which a single female figure presides. The works are larger, more imposing, and more frequently executed in oil than at any other period of his career. Floral motifs with heavy, velvety petals continue to be used as a symbol of femininity, but they appear most often as a decorative foreground or border and no longer attain the same intensity of colour. Indeed, his palette becomes more restrained in general, often limited to three to five colours or different shades of the same colour. At the same time, the more or less systematic use of complementary colours for the bold outlines around his figures and flowers has been abandoned. Reflecting on this line of research in de Feure's art, Frantz noted that 'each of his works is like a symphony where a single tone dominates'.³⁴ This development may well reflect de Feure's experience as a poster designer where he would have explored the possibilities of working with a limited range of colours.

If de Feure's fascination with sapphic love dominated the early Symbolist works to the point of almost being an obsession, the artist now became preoccupied with the femme fatale in all her Symbolist glory. The anti-naturalism of the Decadent aesthetic was, by extension, anti-feminist because Woman symbolised Nature. In contrast to man, woman was incapable of any purely spiritual experience because she was governed by her instincts and thus restricted to a material, that is to say, natural, level. For Baudelaire, 'Woman does not know how to separate the soul from the body. She is as simple as animals are - a satirist would say that it is because she only has a body'.³⁵ Or, more precisely in relation to the Dandy: 'Woman is the opposite of the Dandy. Therefore she is repugnant. Woman is hungry and she wants to eat, thirsty and she wants to drink. She is on heat and she wants to be fucked. It's nothing to be proud of! Woman is *natural*, that is to say, abominable'.³⁶

The dilemma for the Decadent arose from the fact that, while sexuality could not ultimately be denied, it blocked access to the spiritual and artistic universe and reduced man to the animal, instinctive level of woman. The ways out of this impasse were various, and if not contradictory, at least paradoxical. For Baudelaire, one possibility was to turn one's back on sexuality and sublimate it through art - 'the more man cultivates the arts, the less he is sexually excited' - and pay homage to a purely spiritual feminine figure, symbolised in *Les Fleurs du mal* by the cycle dedicated to Madame Sabatier.³⁷ Such an approach provides the starting point for a series of works by de Feure during this period, such as *L'Ombre de Botticelli, ayez pitié de nous!* (cat. 19) in which he



■ Fig. 10, cat. 77 Georges de Feure

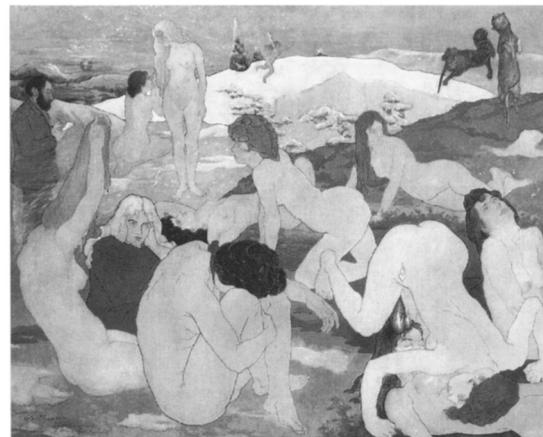
Kief!

photorelief

from *Le Courrier français*,

28th May 1893

private collection



■ Fig. 11 Charles Maurin

L'Aurore de l'amour

1892

oil on canvas, 81 x 100 cm

Collection Barry Humphries



■ Fig. 12 Georges de Feure

La Course à l'abîme

1893

gouache on paper, 77 x 89.5 cm

private collection

examines from a variety of angles the aesthete haunted by and in pursuit of an unattainable ideal.

Another of Baudelaire's solutions was to treat woman and love as simply the means of obtaining pleasure through creating as much harm as possible: 'The supreme and sole delight of love lies in the certainty of causing evil'.³⁸ This attitude, which finds expression in de Feure's art with *L'Ecu du diable* (cat. 13), harks back to the concept prevalent at the beginning of the 19th century of the homme fatal, the Byronian hero to whom women inevitably and irrevocably succumb.

Other Decadent responses reflect the shift through the course of the 19th century from this position of sadistic domination to a fear of and fascination with masochistic subjugation. If the artist risked being tied down to the mundane by the banality and superficiality of woman, even worse was the risk of becoming the enslaved plaything of a fundamentally immoral, cruel and perverse creature: the femme fatale. Octave Uzanne eloquently described de Feure's conception of woman which forms the basis of the femme fatale during this period: 'one feels that he loves womankind in its supreme beauty, which is the supreme evil itself. He strives to paint in all its varieties her eternal feline attributes - the woman of a thousand curves, a thousand fascinations, consumed by a selfish love, given to all excesses, the trunk whence all the vices spring, the source of all the ills, the soul of every forbidden delight. He sees in these sirens nothing but demons whose mission it is, as St. Augustine thought, to increase sin and degrade all vigorous thought'.³⁹

If, in the Pre-Symbolist works, women unwittingly made men suffer, now they deliberately set out to inflict pain

upon them and cause their destruction. The conception of the femme-fatale as a Machiavellian figure plotting man's downfall is best exemplified in such works as *La Botaniste* (cat. 12), *La Princesse Ylsdin* (cat. 22), the lithographic print *La Femme fatale* (cat. 72, fig. 13) and the cover illustration to Uzanne's *Féminies* (cat. 79). More often than not, he has portrayed her in profile, distorting her features to reflect her inner corruption while the background acts as a screen on to which her wicked and perverse thoughts are projected or the drama of her misdeeds played out.

Artistic Posters

The solitary, beautiful and cultivated women of his artistic posters are in sharp contrast with the Baudelairean femme fatale that characterises de Feure's Symbolist work of this period. The abandon, around 1895, of the café-concert reflects de Feure's changing artistic fortunes as much as those of the poster as a means of artistic expression. Once he was in a position to do so, thanks to commissions from the circle of dealers and editors promoting the graphic arts, de Feure gave up producing posters for the café-concert, as he had newspaper illustration, probably because the subject did not inspire him or stimulate his imagination and because such work of popular appeal would appear degrading to an artist who aspired to the élite of Symbolist intelligentsia.

Apart from the change of subject matter, de Feure's conception of the poster undergoes a radical transformation in terms of composition, format and colour. While the modern illustrated poster was, by its nature and function, a new branch of art, distinct from painting or printmaking, with de Feure's artistic posters these distinctions tend to blur and disappear. What is significant with the painted versions of the posters *Le*

■ Fig. 13, cat. 72
Georges de Feure
La Femme fatale
1892
colour lithograph,
34.5 x 25.5 cm
Collection Victor Arwas,
London



■ Fig. 14, cat. 64 Georges de Feure
Affiches et estampes Pierrefort
1897-1898
colour lithograph, 64 x 83 cm
Collection Michel Romand, Paris



■ Fig. 15, cat. 81

Georges de Feure

La Porte des rêves by

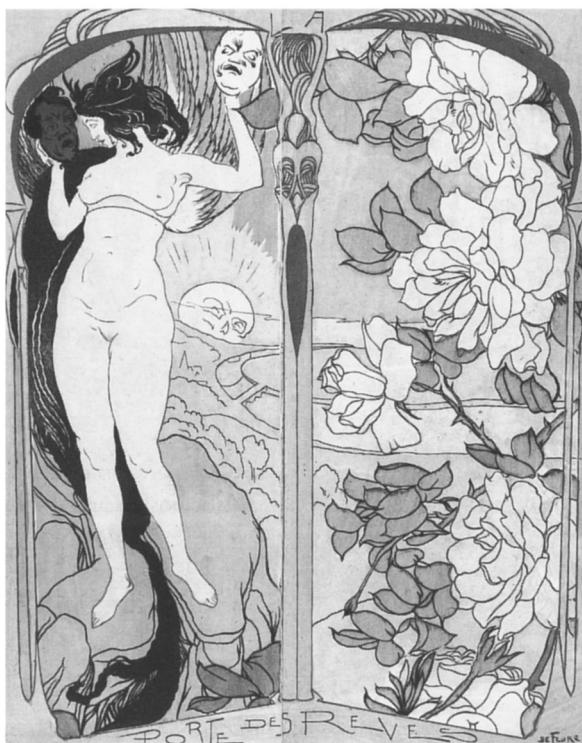
Marcel Schwob

1898

etched and hand-coloured

frontispiece, 21 x 16.5 cm

private collection



Salon des Cent (cat. 61), *A Jeanne d'Arc* (cat. 62) and *Affiches et estampes Pierrefort* (cat. 64, fig. 14) presented here is not so much that their dimensions are almost identical, but that the same image could be considered to function both as a painting and as advertising. Generally, the format of his artistic posters is small, and while the lettering has been the subject of careful attention, most, if not all of them, were printed 'avant la lettre'. These aspects confirm the belief that they are, in fact, collectors posters destined for the portfolio rather than the street where, according to Hiatt, they would be 'condemned... to be torn by every wind, soaked by every shower, blistered by the sun, blurred by the fog'.⁴⁰ The change of clientele is also reflected in the change in his use of colour. The bright primary colours associated with the café-concert have given way to deep greens, rich browns, purples and greys. *Le Journal des ventes* (cat. 66) and *Affiches et estampes Pierrefort* (cat. 64, fig. 14) demonstrate perfectly how his subdued tonalities serve to underline the opulence of his beautiful and elegant women and envelop them with an air of mystery. The latter also illustrates the influence of Japanese prints in his posters, through the foreshortened perspective, flat zones of colour and lack of modelling, but above all through the attention to posture, gesture and facial expression.

From Symbolism to Art Nouveau

Around 1896, at the height of the second phase of his Symbolist art, de Feure started work on a project that was the logical outcome of his preoccupation with the feminine mystique and the sensuality of floral motifs, namely his personal version of the Art Nouveau femme-fleur. He painted a series of women symbolising certain

flowers that was to have been published in the form of a book under the title *Féminiflores*, a name reminiscent of Uzanne's *Féminies*. It included such works as *Tubéreuse* (cat. 26) which inspired Frantz to write: 'His painting does not employ an impasto technique, it has the delicateness and lightness of a skin that one can admire with the artists of the Italian Renaissance'.⁴¹ However, the book was never published. Apart from the fact that the theme of the femme-fleur had become so banal, the necessity of giving an individual interpretation to each flower was probably too restrictive and de Feure finally abandoned the project.

At the same time as he was working on the *Féminiflores*, de Feure had also started work on another project, the illustration and decoration of a collection of tales by the Symbolist writer Marcel Schwob. While the former project came to nothing, the latter resulted in one of the finest and most important of late nineteenth-century illustrated books: *La Porte des rêves* (cat. 81, fig. 15). Published in November 1898, it marks the balanced synthesis of Symbolist evocation and Art Nouveau ornamentation in de Feure's art and, in a wider context, the turning point between the two. The execution of the illustrations, decorative borders and tailpieces took him more than two years to complete and, although de Feure did not re-employ motifs from the book in other media, their style spilled over into the rest of his art, defining and characterising a third and final Symbolist phase.

The series of gouaches commissioned by Baron Vitta (cat. 29 to 33) illustrates this stylistic affinity well, but rather than seeking inspiration in the writings of the author of *La Porte des rêves*, de Feure has once again turned to Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal* and particularly the poem *Les Femmes damnées*. While certain of these gouaches such as *Aux lueurs des résines croulantes* (cat. 29) and *Imaginez Diane* (cat. 32) follow the poet's verbal imagery so faithfully as to be visual transcriptions of his verses, other works of this period such as *La Gourmandise* (cat. 36) and *L'Orgueil* (cat. 37) from The Seven Deadly Sins display his usual sophisticated and subtle approach to the handling of subject matter.

In many respects the works of this period mark a return to the characteristics of de Feure's first Symbolist phase: the large oils dating from the years 1894-1896 have given way to gouache compositions where once again small female figures, often naked, are associated with large, voluptuous flowers spreading their convoluted petals over the picture plane. However, his palette continues to be restrained and the tumult of colour has not returned. At the same time, his line has become more assured, more eloquent while his subject matter is perhaps even more overtly sensual and decadent, as may be judged by *La Femme damnée* (cat. 33).

After two long years of work leading to the publication of *La Porte des rêves*, de Feure effectively turned his back on Symbolism to focus his attention on an area of artistic activity that had attracted him throughout the 1890's, namely, the decorative arts.

The Revelation of an Artiste-Décorateur

It was in June 1900, shortly after the opening of the Exposition universelle in Paris that the critic Julius Meier-Graefe, using the pseudonym G.M. Jacques, wrote: 'M. Georges de Feure counts among the numerous recruits caught up in the circle around Bing over the last few months. We did not really expect to see him in this enterprise because, although M. de Feure did some furniture in the old days, about three or four years ago, it is above all for his illustrations and original prints, of a fantasy and a symbolism sometimes a little peculiar without falling into the baroque, that he has made a name for himself. Well, here is M. de Feure suddenly revealed as an artist of the first rank in decorative art. How is it possible?'⁴²

Meier-Graefe's admiration of and astonishment at this hitherto hidden aspect of de Feure's talent carries even more weight when it is realised that few were better placed than the critic to judge the artist's potential. One time collaborator of the revue *Pan* in Germany and former associate of Bing, Meier-Graefe was the founder of *La Maison Moderne*, an enterprise similar to Bing's *Art Nouveau*, and editor of his own magazine, *L'Art décoratif*. De Feure was no stranger to Meier-Graefe; he had already written about the artist in the second issue of *L'Art décoratif* in November 1898 and in February 1899 he had corresponded with O.J. Bierbaum about the possibility of him illustrating *Das Schöne Mädelchen*.⁴³

When Meier-Graefe had written in his earlier article 'M. de Feure has also been involved in furniture and other branches of the decorative arts', he probably had in mind the designs the artist had produced for *L'Artisan Moderne* or in collaboration with René Wiener which had been shown in the *objets d'art* section of the *Salon de la Société nationale des Beaux-Arts* in 1897 and 1898 respectively.⁴⁴

L'Artisan Moderne had been founded around 1894 by André Marty, the editor of *L'Estampe originale*, with the following two objectives: '(1) To ensure the full support of the most original among artist creators, to group them thus around a common idea and in a common interest; (2) To limit the overheads to a minimum, in such a way as to devote totally the money of our subscribers to the production of our objects'.⁴⁵ To achieve this second aim, *L'Artisan Moderne* had no shop of its own, but depended on nine Parisian galleries and print dealers including *La Bodinière*, Arnould, Kleinmann, Pierrefort and Sagot as well as galleries in Brussels, Munich and Dresden as outlets.⁴⁶ Less than six months after its inception, Marty published a circular to attract subscribers in which he outlined the enterprise's first steps: 'The experiment could have failed. It has fully succeeded. Rupert Carabin, Alexandre Charpentier, Georges de Feure, Henry Nocq were the first to respond to our appeal'.⁴⁷ Thus, Marty himself considered de Feure to be one of the original participants in the undertaking. Because of the very nature of the enterprise, it is

impossible to give a precise date of birth, but the period of gestation was long. There was, of course, no inauguration and works were provided by artists on an *ad hoc* basis. De Feure exhibited a piece of decorated furniture at the *Salon de la Société nationale des Beaux-Arts* in 1894 which probably had been executed with Marty in mind, but it was not until 1897 when he exhibited a high side-table and a table rug 'avec applications et broderies par Mme André Marty et Mlle Marie Gautier' that the name of *L'Artisan Moderne* was explicitly mentioned for the first time.⁴⁸ De Feure's correspondence with Marty confirms that 1897 was the year of most intense activity, but apart from these objects and the lithographed lampshade (cat. 74), no other designs for *L'Artisan Moderne* are known.⁴⁹ During the period in which he collaborated with Marty, de Feure also produced an exceptional *Art Nouveau* cane handle (cat. 87) which, given the variant signature, most probably dates from around 1895-1896 when the artist was often in Belgium and, in November 1897, he responded to René Wiener's appeal to artists to provide him with projects for leather bookbindings (cat. 104).

Overall, de Feure's involvement with the decorative arts during the 1890's was intermittent and, if not inconsequential, at least lacking in impact; it was not until the *Exposition universelle* in 1900 and his contribution to the *Pavillon de L'Art Nouveau* Bing that he achieved international acclaim as an *artiste-décorateur*.

The Origins of *Art Nouveau*

Siegfried Bing (fig. 16) was a perspicacious Jew from Hamburg who, by the 1890's had a well-established reputation in the field of oriental art as a connoisseur, collector, dealer, author and publisher as well as exhibition organiser.⁵⁰ His commercial expertise had been gained as a youth while working in the family business, an international concern specialising in the import and export of porcelain, glass and decorative accessories, but later directly involved in the manufacture of ceramics.⁵¹

By the end of the 1880's, he was beginning to feel that the qualities of craftsmanship and beauty of the best of Japanese art were lost on many Europeans, who were satisfied with the mediocre merchandise that was flooding the French market, and from March 1888 to April 1891, he published a monthly magazine, *Le Japon artistique*, with the intention of educating Western taste.⁵²

In 1894, Bing was sent to the United States by Henri Roujon, Directeur des Beaux-Arts, to investigate the level of development in decorative and industrial art. During this visit, he met Louis Comfort Tiffany, whose production methods impressed him as much as his art. Encouraged by Tiffany and his example, he returned to France with the feeling that he could play a crucial role in a European revival of the decorative arts with Paris at its centre.⁵³

After a period of preparation, during which he announced his intention of having a permanent and



■ *Fig. 16*
Siegfried Bing
photograph
c. 1900



■ *Fig. 17*
Entrance to
'L'Art
Nouveau'
Archives
d'Architecture
du XXe siècle
de l'Institut
Français
d'Architecture

■ *Fig. 18*
Dining-room by Henry van de
Velde and decorative panels by
Paul Ranson for 'L'Art Nouveau'



international exhibition in which traditional distinctions between the arts would be abolished and appealed to artists to submit 'all works of art which display a personal conception in keeping with the modern spirit', his transformed premises at 22, rue de Provence opened on 26th December 1895 under the name L'Art Nouveau (fig. 17). His advertising, at the time of the inaugural exhibition, proclaimed that 'L'Art Nouveau will fight to eliminate ugliness and pretentious luxury from all everyday objects, to impregnate them right down to the smallest and most insignificant with refinement of taste and the charm of simple beauty'.⁵⁴

Some six hundred and sixty-two items were listed in the catalogue covering virtually every branch of the plastic arts. In addition to display cases, there were model interiors including a rotunda painted by Albert Besnard, three rooms by Henry van de Velde, a bedroom by Maurice Denis and a rococo boudoir by Charles Condor in which a vast array of fine and decorative art objects were exhibited. Most tendencies in painting, from Realism to Symbolism, Impressionism and Neo-Impressionism, were represented. Among the furniture, carpets and tapestries were panels and stained glass windows by the Nabis and Toulouse-Lautrec, posters by Will Bradley and the Glasgow Four, prints by Carrière, woodcuts by George Auriol and Henri Rivière, illustrated books by Aubrey Beardsley and Walter Crane, ceramics by Bigot and Delaherche, glassware by Tiffany and Gallé, jewelry by Lalique, sculpture by Rodin and Meunier.

Yet, confronted with this enormous display, the public and critics were indignant rather than impressed. The name of the gallery almost as much as the choice of objects exhibited provoked scathing attacks from the press. The underlying criteria of modernity and the principle of the synthesis of the arts were lost on the critics who felt that the public was being tricked by the gallery's name into believing that it could see something new or innovative. Many of the artists were already well known and a good number of the paintings and objects had already been exhibited elsewhere. The rejection of the traditional divisions between the arts had resulted in incoherence and diversity of style was merely confusion, but most damning of all, Bing's internationalism was seen as an open affront to the supremacy of French taste.⁵⁵ Just a few days after the opening of L'Art Nouveau, on 30th December 1895, Edmond de Goncourt noted in his diary: 'Really, will we be *denationalised*, morally conquered ... in these times when there seems to be only room in France for Anglo-Saxon or Dutch furniture? No! That, the future furniture of France? No! No!'.⁵⁶ A particularly unsavoury attack appeared in *Le Figaro* on 28th December 1895: 'All that smells of the vicious Englishman, of the Jewess addicted to morphine, of the sly Belgian, or a charming mixture of these three poisons'.⁵⁷

Bing later justified the choice of name for his gallery and his intentions: 'L'Art Nouveau at the time of its creation did not aspire in any way to the honor of

becoming a generic term. It was simply the name of an establishment opened as a meeting ground for all ardent young spirits anxious to manifest the modernness of their tendencies, and open also to all lovers of art who desired to see the working of the hitherto unrevealed forces of our day. Thus the term was nothing but a title, a name, or if you like, a sign'.⁵⁸

Renovating the Past

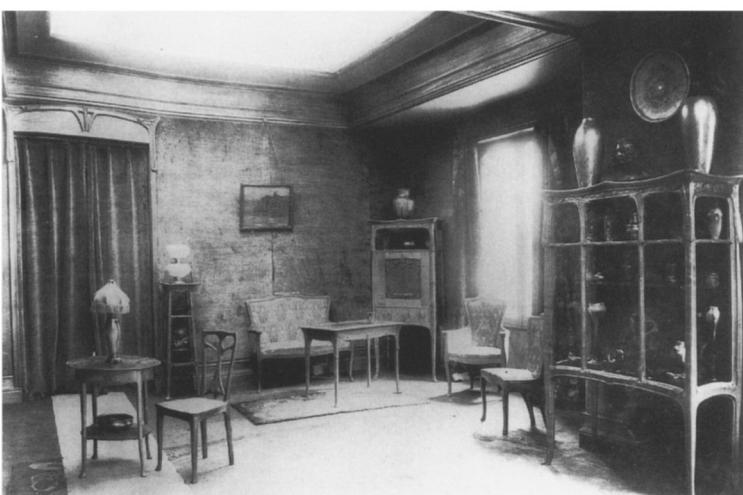
However, by 1897, Bing had come to realise that there had been some basis to the criticisms and that if his operation was to be a financial success, he could no longer remain a middleman, representing artists and at the mercy of their whims, but would have to take control of producing his own models. He explained: 'Soon, however, disillusion came. The productions gathered together in my establishment had a chaotic appearance. Many were faulty in conception... It was evident that the future of this new born movement was in great danger. The only way to save it was to make it follow a fixed direction, carefully marked out'.⁵⁹ Bing felt that this direction lay within the boundaries of sobriety and good sense, based on the fundamental rules that each article should be adapted to its proper purpose and that harmonies should be sought in line and colour. He concluded: 'there was only one way in which these theories could be put into practice - namely, by having the articles made under my personal direction, and by securing the assistance of such artists as seemed best disposed to carry out my ideas'.⁶⁰

Bing's ideas and the transformation they had undergone since the opening of L'Art Nouveau were a response to the existant market situation both in terms of economic and aesthetic factors. On a superficial level, a move away from his earlier international eclecticism was inevitable once he had decided to produce his own models. Given the chauvinism of the public and his critics, he would be unlikely to succeed if he did not provide them with something they found appealing, in other words, specifically French. On an aesthetic level, the problem could be formulated as how to reconcile tradition and modernity, or what constituted a truly French style of the late nineteenth century. While in England, William Morris and the Arts and Crafts Movement had blamed industrial capitalism with its profit motive and mechanical processes for the decline of the applied arts and harked back to the Gothic period as a golden age, in France it was the Revolution and the abolition of the *Corporations* or guilds in 1791 which were perceived as the root of the problem. Since then, not only was the transmission of knowledge and experience from one generation of craftsmen to the next being lost, but also the capacity for stylistic traditions to evolve naturally as each generation assimilated and built on this heritage. The continuity of tradition had been severed, the integrity of style had been debased, its historical function lost as designers simply plundered the past and plagiarised

■ Fig. 19 Georges de Feure
Entrance to the Pavillon de
L'Art Nouveau Bing at the
Exposition Universelle 1900



■ Fig. 20 Edward Colonna
Sitting-room at the Bing
pavilion, 1900



■ Fig. 21
Eugène
Gaillard
Dining-
room at
the Bing
pavilion,
1900



■ Fig. 22
Intense
activity among
Bing's
craftsmen,
1899-1900
Archives Hilda
Benichou



■ Fig. 23
Modellers at
work at L'Art
Nouveau
Bing, 1899-
1900
Archives Hilda
Benichou

previous historical styles rather than innovating.

In order for Bing to compete with long established furniture businesses and continue his programme of reviving the decorative arts it was necessary to distance himself from their complacent historicism and find a stylistic orientation that was both genuinely modern and French, respecting traditional values without falling into nostalgic sentimentality.

As Bing himself explained, the guiding ethic for his designers was to 'thoroughly impregnate oneself anew with the old French tradition; try to pick up the thread, with all its grace, elegance, sound logic and purity, and give it new developments, just as if the thread had not been broken for nearly a century'.⁶¹ The principal artists Bing chose as being the 'best disposed' to put these theories into practice were Eugène Gaillard, Edward Colonna and Georges de Feure. Given the nature of Bing's programme, it is somewhat ironical that of these three, only Gaillard was actually French.

Bing set up a series of studios or workshops on the premises at 22, rue de Provence and the adjoining 19, rue Chauchat to create decorative designs (figs. 22 and 23). They were well organised, with each having a clearly defined function: projects were passed on from the designers' studio to the modellers who would make a maquette, and it was only if this met with Bing's approval that it would finally be handed over to the cabinet-makers and the sculptors.⁶²

Eugène Gaillard was apparently working for Bing as early as June 1897, while jewelry designed by Colonna was on show at 22, rue de Provence by late spring or summer 1898. Just how and when de Feure was recruited remains a mystery, but a date of late 1899 seems probable. For example, when an Exhibition of L'Art Nouveau S. Bing, Paris was held at the Grafton Gallery in London from May to July 1899, Colonna was well represented, but there was nothing by de Feure.⁶³

Whereas Colonna had taken the initiative and had shown a portfolio of decorative designs to Bing who was so impressed that he recruited him on the spot, according to Marc Croisilles, writing in May 1901, it was the patron of L'Art Nouveau who had suggested to de Feure that he should become one of his designers: 'Having then offered paintings to M. Bing, G. de Feure received from him an answer where it was made more or less clear that the paintings had arrived too late but if it suited him to design furniture and look for new forms in this field, he would be granted total freedom'.⁶⁴ Similarly, Meier-Graefe was also of the opinion that it was Bing who had sensed the artist's potential as a designer: 'Has M. de Feure revealed a side of himself to M. Bing that until now he has kept carefully hidden or has M. Bing detected a side of de Feure of which he was himself unaware? As the first version is out of keeping with the ways of artists, one must rather be inclined towards the second'.⁶⁵

Le Pavillon de L'Art Nouveau Bing

Recruited at such a late date before the Exposition universelle, the preponderant role conferred to de Feure in the execution of the Pavillon de L'Art Nouveau Bing may be considered as a measure of the confidence and esteem in which he was held. The pavilion was a single-storied structure with a facade decorated with large canvases painted by de Feure (fig. 21). These portrayed elegantly fashionable young women as allegories of Architecture and the applied arts. Architecture, the 'sovereign of all the arts', was placed between the two entrances to the pavilion, flanked on either side by Sculpture, Metalwork, Jewelry, Glasswork, Pottery and Leatherwork.⁶⁶ De Feure's women displeased the art critic Jackson, who felt that they had 'the various parts out of scale with one another' and were 'garish in colour', whereas, for Gabriel Mourey, they were 'elegant and svelte' and 'with singing colours, undulating lines, of a rare harmony'.⁶⁷ However, Jackson did concede that they were 'a bad preparation for the delicate and beautiful colour harmonies which one finds within'.⁶⁸

The principal entrances gave on to a hall with some furniture by Gaillard. To the left, this led to the dining-room, also by Gaillard, which was decorated with wall panels by a young Spanish artist, José-Maria Sert. The salon by Colonna, divided into a reception area and music corner, came next, followed by de Feure's dressing-room and Gaillard's bedroom. A short passage, formed by four stained glass windows representing The Seasons by de Feure led from the bedroom to the boudoir which was also by de Feure.

Despite intense activity in the preparations, the Pavillon de L'Art Nouveau Bing was not finished until well after the official opening of the Exposition universelle, but this did not deter the critics who, in sharp contrast to their response to the opening of L'Art Nouveau in December 1895, now praised Bing and his team of designers unequivocally. Furthermore, the response was international in scope. As Gabriel Weisberg has observed, 'No other display at the Exposition received similar intense scrutiny from art journals or had its objects as seriously appreciated and enthusiastically purchased by foreign visitors as did *Art Nouveau Bing*'.⁶⁹

Bing's policy of wooing the public by presenting designs which were elegant, modern, but above all, quintessentially French, struck the right note with the critics. Mourey was but one among many to praise Bing and his team of designers: 'far from letting themselves be seduced by the strange and the fantastic, we sense them motivated by loftier goals; what makes them so praiseworthy is their aim to protect themselves from outside influences and renew the traditions of true French styles instead of *parisianising*, according to changes in fashion, English, German or Belgian models'.⁷⁰ Moreover, this appeal to tradition was not simply a superficial reference to past styles, but an attempt to enter into the spirit of 'these traditions, all French, of grace, refinement,

■ Fig. 24 Georges de Feure
Cabinet de toilette, 1900



■ Fig. 25 Georges de Feure
Boudoir, 1900



elegance and, of course, luxury'.⁷¹ De Feure in particular was singled out for special attention, and much of the literature on the Pavillon de L'Art Nouveau Bing is devoted to elogies on his designs, not only for their intrinsic qualities, but also because they perfectly characterised the spirit of the enterprise.⁷² In his decoration of the facade, the artist had shown himself to be a 'true magician of refinement and subtlety', while his stained glass windows were described as being 'of a rare splendour... inexpressible with words', but it was for his dressing-room and boudoir that de Feure was praised the most.⁷³ As with Colonna's work for the salon, de Feure was responsible for the design of every element of furniture, textiles and accessories in his two interiors. The dressing-room, with its furniture in Hungarian ash, with silk brocade in pale grey shades of blue, mauve and green 'so fine and light that it seems rather to be the dust of crushed pearls' and embellished with white copper fittings 'delicately worked with thin and supple lines, fragile flower stems with harmonious curves' was judged to be a 'true visual delight'.⁷⁴ De Feure's approach to mural decoration was applauded, while his approach to carpet design was felt to be exceptional in that for the first time a 'French' artist had been able to determine in terms of line and colour the ornamental character best suited to objects playing a supportive role in interior decoration.⁷⁵

But it was de Feure's boudoir (cat. 82, fig. 25) more than anything else that inspired the critics: for Viviane, there was no doubt, it was the 'jewel of jewels' of the exhibition, while Gabriel Mourey considered it to be 'one of the most exquisite and perfect decorative ensembles that our period has created'.⁷⁶ He then went on to describe it as 'the masterpiece of this exhibition and perhaps, in its category, of the Exposition universelle of 1900'.⁷⁷

In an article published in *The Studio*, Mourey explained the reasoning behind his opinion to an English audience: 'Fully to appreciate the value of this work one must bear in mind the object aimed at by M. Bing, and carried out by M. de Feure. It is simply this: to revive the tradition of the graceful French furniture, adapt it to modern requirements, make it conformable to our present ideas of comfort - give it, in fact, the impress of the age'.⁷⁸ Meier-Graefe similarly applauded de Feure for his references to the past, seeing them as a conscious attempt to establish a modern tradition which provided continuity through acknowledgement of its ancestry: 'It is not revolutionary work; it is not a question of upsetting everything, of overturning everything, of exterminating the past right down to and including the rules of geometry. It is, on the contrary, the veritable return to the natural, of which the first innovators, carried away in the heat of the moment, had lost sight'.⁷⁹ Rather than dismissing de Feure for not creating innovations in the basic structure of furniture, he praised him for giving 'this skeleton... a new flesh; and new in the fullest sense of the word'.⁸⁰

The almost feminine grace of de Feure's interiors had

not escaped the attention of the critics either. Meier-Graefe felt that their delicateness revealed an understanding of the female temperament and catered for womanly preferences without falling into sentimentality: 'he knows the dose of all that... from that point of view, it is very knowledgeable, the art of M. de Feure'.⁸¹

While Bing had his own workshops for the execution of furniture designs, the question of economy dictated that he should seek the involvement of established, specialised manufactories for the production of accessories. As with other designs issuing from his studios, such projects were checked by Bing before dispatch. Among the outside manufactories that Bing called upon, some were French while others were German, indicating that Bing had not abandoned his international approach, at least on one level. Among the German manufacturers, the Rheinische Glashütte in Köln-Ehrenfels was responsible for tableglass, while Müller-Hickler in Darmstadt executed stained glass windows after de Feure's designs.⁸² In the field of textiles, Deuss und Oetker in Krefeld were responsible for manufacturing some of the silks he designed, while others were produced in France by Lamy et Bornet in Lyon.⁸³ Also in Lyon was the company Cornille Frères which manufactured cloth printed with de Feure patterns. Scheurer, Lantle et Cie at Thann, near Mulhouse, produced velvets after de Feure designs, while Forrer printed his wallpapers.⁸⁴

■ *Fig. 26*

Georges de Feure in his studio at 5 bis, cité Malesherbes, c. 1901



As to the manufacture of porcelain, Gabriel Weisberg relates how Bing used his nomination as president of the Foreign Section for the Exposition internationale artistique et industrielle de Céramique at St Petersburg in 1900 as the 'opportunity to look for a manufactory to produce quality porcelains for his own shop. Little probably came of this search in time for the Paris Exposition, but he eventually selected the firm of Gérard, Dufraisseix and Abbot of Limoges'.⁸⁵ There is the possibility that de Feure was instrumental in this choice and had, in fact, already worked with the company (see cat. 110). Over the next few years G.D.A. manufactured, if not a large number, at least a wide variety of porcelains by de Feure and Colonna. Both artists designed vases and, while Colonna was responsible for a complete dinner service, de Feure produced models for teapots, jugs, cups and saucers, toothpick and matchholders, trays for visit cards, sweetboxes and figurines.

Many of de Feure's decorative motifs, like those of Colonna, are based on plant forms, but de Feure also added the female figure and even lean and supple greyhounds to his repertory. Now devoid of any sinister connotation, de Feure's elegant women spread their graceful and elongated forms across plates, clocks, mirrors or firescreens. As with his furniture, where Meier-Graefe felt that de Feure had added new flesh to the basic skeleton, so with his porcelains the innovation is in the style and colouring of the decoration rather than in the basic form or structure. The floral motifs decorating his porcelains are often so highly stylised as to make identification of the individual plants impossible, but they are nevertheless restrained, limited to pastel coloured reliefs on a white or pale background. In other fields, the impetus towards organic decoration becomes so strong that the whole object is overwhelmed and its functional purpose almost lost in the process. Thus a lamp (cat. 103) comes to resemble a plant in metal and glass rather than a simple source of light.

Concerning the designs produced at L'Art Nouveau Bing, Martin Eidelberg feels that 'the parallels that exist between the basic shapes of de Feure's and Colonna's tables and chairs are to be understood in terms of a close-knit working relationship within the group' rather than resulting in any degree from the orientation provided by Bing's directives.⁸⁶ Furthermore, he considers that 'despite the interaction between the artists of Bing's atelier, each one's personality remained distinct: compared with de Feure's fascination with femmes fatales and exotic angular (*sic*) flowers... Colonna emerges as a chaste and lyrical designer'.⁸⁷ Certainly, 'Gaillard's robust, Baroque sense of energy' sets him apart from the other two, but the distinctions between the designs of de Feure and Colonna are not always evident.⁸⁸ In his discussion of their porcelains, Weisberg has underlined how the similarities generated by Bing's guiding directives and selection process served to create the impression of a characteristic house style: 'Yet unless the artist's mark was on the object's base, critics could not always tell which of Bing's

craftsmen had designed a particular work. This confusion of identities helped Bing to make the *art nouveau* style appear unique unto itself, rather than a disparate collection of works by distinctly individual artisans'.⁸⁹

Striving for Independence

De Feure's association with Bing continued throughout the period of L'Art Nouveau, but spurred on by the success of his designs at the Exposition universelle and in response to demands for his services from other enterprises, he set up his own independent 'Atelier de Feure' at 5 bis, cité Malesherbes during the spring of 1901 (fig. 26).⁹⁰ Founded in collaboration with the German architect, Theodor Cossmann, whose family furniture business in Aachen acted as agents for the de Feure designs, this studio lasted until early 1905.⁹¹ In April 1901, immediately after the presentation of his porcelain and furniture fittings for L'Art Nouveau Bing at the eighth exhibition of the Libre Esthétique in Brussels, Meier-Graefe's *L'Art décoratif* carried the announcement that the artist was free to accept other commissions: 'M. de Feure, reserving forthwith total independence for his artistic production, all objects originating from him will carry his monogram or his signature with the date of completion.'⁹² That same month, *Art et décoration*, published a similar statement, this time informing the public that he would be giving lessons in decorative art: 'The painter G. de Feure, whose furniture and applied art objects were so admired at the Exposition universelle, has asked us to announce that he is starting, in his town house in the cité Malesherbes, courses in Decorative Art which will be held on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The latter is reserved for ladies'.⁹³

De Feure's motivations were, in all probability, financial. When he had been recruited by Bing in 1899, a regular revenue had brought some stability to a period of his life when he had difficulty, not only in supporting himself, but also in providing for his wife whom he had

■ Fig. 27

Furniture in various stages of construction at the 'Atelier de Feure', c. 1901



■ Fig. 28
Dining-room at the
Restaurant Konss
decorated by de Feure,
1901



married on 7th July 1897 and their daughter who was born on 3rd November 1898. On several occasions during April 1899, de Feure had written to Léon Deschamps, editor of *La Plume*, about his urgent need for money and offered to sell him his rights on the album *Bruges mystique et sensuelle* and even design a new poster for Le Salon des Cent.⁹⁴ De Feure no doubt felt that he was worth much more than the retainer he received from Bing. Independence would not only bring him more work and total control over his production, but would oblige Bing, if he still wished to make use of his services, to pay more. For the execution of his designs, de Feure turned to Léon Jallot who supervised the production of furniture in Bing's own workshops.⁹⁵

Bing's letter dated 5th April 1901 to Friedrich Deneken, Director of the Kaiser Wilhelm Museum in Krefeld, reveals not only his sense of hurt and betrayal caused by de Feure's behaviour, but also his refusal to see mere profit as having any relation with the objectives that had motivated and guided L'Art Nouveau: 'After all the chances I have given him to gain experience and further his talents in the making of small objects, and after my sensational production of items according to his design, after all that, success has so swollen his head that it is difficult to deal with him. In any event, he has chanced upon some capitalist with whose help he is about to establish his own workshop (for however long this may last).'⁹⁶

A major commission for the 'Atelier de Feure' came

■ Fig. 29
The artist working on
the decoration of the
Restaurant Konss with
the help of assistants,
1901



from La Maison Moderne, which had been founded by Meier-Graefe in the autumn of 1899. Indeed, it may have been in order to accept this commission that the 'Atelier de Feure' was actually set up. La Maison Moderne was one of a number of enterprises similar to L'Art Nouveau created in the wake of Bing's change of policy around 1897. For example, in Berlin Keller and Reiner opened ten exhibition rooms furnished and decorated by leading artists, and Uiterwijk and Co in The Hague opened their own store under the name of 'Arts and Crafts' and commissioned Henry van de Velde to design their installation.⁹⁷ Van de Velde was also the principal designer of La Maison Moderne, which also included among its ranks Maurice Dufrêne, Paul Follot and Abel Landry. Other artists associated with, or exhibited at La Maison Moderne included Constantin Meunier, George Minne, Heinrich Vogeler, Koloman Moser and Dalpayrat, indeed, many of the artists who had figured in the opening exhibition of L'Art Nouveau in December 1895 and had subsequently joined Meier-Graefe.

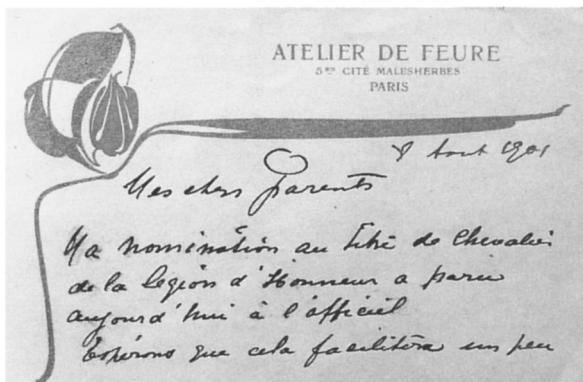
De Feure was asked to undertake the decoration of one of the dining-rooms of a German restaurant, the Restaurant Konss, to be opened on the corner of the rue Grammont and the boulevard des Italiens in Paris. A similar restaurant had been a fashionable success at the Exposition universelle and its administrator, P.H.C. Kons, under the direction of the Palast Hotel Berlin, decided to follow this up by opening a permanent establishment in the French capital.⁹⁸ Bruno Möhring, a well-known German architect who had been responsible for the exhibition restaurant, was called upon to design and co-ordinate the installation of the new restaurant. Fellow Germans, including L. Kayser, O. Scheer, M. Läuger and Albert and Gustav Männchen designed some of the work which was then shipped to Paris, while most of the actual execution and installation was undertaken by La Maison Moderne.⁹⁹ The renovation work lasted from 15th January to 17th April 1901 and cost a total of 242,000 Marks.¹⁰⁰ One may wonder if it was worth the expense. According to Meier-Graefe himself, writing as G.M. Jacques in *L'Art décoratif*, it was enough to put one off one's food. The restaurant, which was on the first floor of the building, had the entrance landing decorated by Läuger, but 'as soon as this agreeable intermediary is passed, the confusion for eye and spirit starts'.¹⁰¹ As soon as one entered the foyer 'the wood stained in violent colours... (and) the upholstery in garish tones clash in the flood of electric light, perturbing the person arriving as would a shrieking noise'.¹⁰² As for the main dining-room with its furniture in 'ash stained deep red' and 'purplish blue and lilac velvet', Meier-Graefe felt that 'whether on purpose or by luck, this assembly of irritating colours remains relatively calm', but in the next room, 'on the contrary, nothing can diminish the violence of the colours'.¹⁰³ There was a third and smaller dining-room at the rear: 'this one is rather dark; the eye would find some rest here, if it were not for a ceiling where great patches of red and orange are spread, for goodness knows what

reason'.¹⁰⁴ As for the brick wall under a balcony in the same dining-room, 'it is not by the delicateness of effect that the author wishes to leave his mark'.¹⁰⁵

There was, however, a fourth dining-room, situated to the left of the main one, where green enamelled brickwork framed decorative panels by de Feure (fig. 28). In addition to the five vertical panels which were hung opposite the windows, two large semi-circular panels decorated the end walls. The size and position of each of de Feure's panels had been determined by Möhring, who was responsible for the design of the rest of this interior. Each of de Feure's vertical panels represented a fashionable woman wearing a flowing scarf or boa against a somewhat severe brickwork pattern which was dictated by the limited space accorded to him and the enamelled tiles of the walls themselves. With the end panels, where space permitted, de Feure placed his elegant young women in verdant parkland scenes. A period photograph (fig. 29) shows de Feure painting one of these end panels with the help of assistants, possibly students of his decorative art classes. This decoration by de Feure inspired Meier-Graefe to write 'one can imagine nothing sweeter and at the same time newer than these harmonies where attenuated mauves and lilacs - if these charming tones can be given a name - dominate'.¹⁰⁶ Unfortunately, 'the crudities in which M. Möhring revels (in the enamelled brickwork) are found as well in the green of the woodwork and the furniture' and 'in the middle of all this violence, the delicateness of M. de Feure's colours is almost lost'.¹⁰⁷ Mourey shared Meier-Graefe's opinion that it was a shame that de Feure had not been entrusted with the decoration of the entire dining-room, 'for the decorative panels that the artist has painted overflow with unrestrained imagination, and they are out of tune with the heaviness and useless audacity of the whole'.¹⁰⁸

In the meantime, de Feure was represented in the *objets d'art* section at the Salon de la Société nationale des Beaux-Arts with a display cabinet and a wide selection of porcelain and some metalwork. His contribution attracted the attention of Charles Torquet, who devoted an article to the artist in *L'Art décoratif*. What impressed Torquet as much as the quality and diversity of de Feure's designs was the artist's interest in the industrial techniques employed in their execution and his close collaboration with the specialists involved. Such an approach led not only to an improvement in the quality of his designs thanks to an understanding of the nature of the materials, their possibilities and limits, but also allowed him to experiment with and benefit from the latest technological advances.¹⁰⁹

In August 1901, de Feure's contribution to the decorative arts received official recognition when he was nominated Chevalier de la Légion d'honneur as a Dutch citizen.¹¹⁰ To celebrate this event 'the friends and admirers of Georges de Feure will offer him a banquet on Tuesday 3rd December at 7 in the evening at the Restaurant Konss', held, naturally enough, in the dining-room he had decorated.¹¹¹ The guests included critics who had



■ Fig. 30

Notelet from de Feure to his parents announcing his nomination as Chevalier de la Légion d'honneur, 8th August 1901
private collection

written articles or reviews on de Feure such as Roger Marx, Octave Uzanne, Gabriel Mourey, Léon Ruffe, Marcel Batilliat, the Symbolist poet, Paul Adam, who had prefaced the catalogue of his first one man show in 1894, John Jacobson, the inventor of the process of 'applications sur étoffe' used in de Feure's furniture, the painter Ten Cate, and his close friend, the playwright André Mycho. In all, more than eighty guests were present.¹¹²

In the meantime, de Feure had decided to transfer to L'Art Nouveau Bing 'the execution and sale of all my models for the whole of France'.¹¹³ De Feure had no doubt found that running his own independent studio had brought more problems and responsibilities than he had bargained for in terms of production and distribution, while Bing was well aware of how dependent his own enterprise was on the artist's extraordinary creativity. The relative autonomy of the 'Atelier de Feure' *vis-à-vis* L'Art Nouveau Bing is problematic and suggests a compromise between de Feure's desire for full independence and practical considerations.

The following year, in addition to being personally well represented at the Salon de la Société nationale des Beaux-Arts, showing two display cabinets, a screen, an armchair, a stained glass window, and a clock as well as a large selection of porcelain and metalwork, he participated with L'Art Nouveau Bing in the Exposition de l'Union centrale des Arts décoratifs with the presentation of a display cabinet and a variety of porcelains.¹¹⁴ L'Art Nouveau Bing also took part in the Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte Decorativa Moderna, the first international exhibition of modern decorative art held in Turin in 1902. Although Bing did not send much in the way of new designs (indeed, most of the articles of the period are illustrated with old photographs), de Feure was awarded a diploma of honour, the same as at the Exposition universelle in Paris.



■ Fig. 31, cat. 54
Georges de Feure
Le Jardin de l'artiste
à Bois-le-Roi
1900-1902
gouache on paper, 28.5 x 33 cm
private collection



■ Fig. 32, cat. 48
Georges de Feure
La Fée Caprice
1895-1896
oil on canvas, 115 x 95 cm
Collection Raymond Toupenet,
Paris



■ Fig. 32, cat. 48
Georges de Feure
Fleur d'automne
1900-1903
gouache on paper, 28.5 x 20 cm
Collection Raymond Toupenet,
Paris

■ Fig. 34, cat. 50
Georges de Feure
La Source dans la forêt
1898-1903
gouache on paper, 42 x 23 cm
Collection George Encil, Freeport,
Bahamas

A Major Retrospective

The most important exhibition of de Feure's work was held in Bing's gallery at 22, rue de Provence from 30th March to 20th April 1903, followed by smaller presentations at the Haagsche Kunstkring and the Kunstgewerbehaus in Hamburg. Some 155 paintings, watercolours and lithographs as well as a wide variety of decorative objects were presented. The exhibition attracted a great deal of interest and prompted articles in the French, Dutch, German, English and American press. While some critics, such as Emile Sedeyn, felt that it marked de Feure's triumphal return as a painter, others including René Piaux, Léon Ruffe and Gabriel Mourey saw the two aspects of painter and decorator equally subsumed in the multi-faceted talent of the artist.¹¹⁵

Of the original works included in the exhibition, some dated back to the mid 1890's: oils such as *La Voix du mal* (cat. 15) and lithographs including the album *Bruges mystique et sensuelle* (cat. 75). However, the vast majority were more recent, allowing the critics and public alike to discover that, during the three or four years de Feure had been working for Bing as a decorator, producing literally hundreds of designs for every aspect of interior decoration, he had not been idle as a painter.

By far the most surprising development in de Feure's art was landscape painting. Although a work simply entitled *Paysage* had been included in the *Aquarelles par Georges de Feure* almost a decade earlier and an *Ile de Walcheren* shown at the *Salon de la Société nationale des Beaux-Arts* in 1896, this was the first and largest presentation of such works, with more than fifty dominating the exhibition. Indeed, René Piaux believed that it was the 'most recent revelation of the artist'.¹¹⁶ From that moment on, it was almost invariably landscapes that de Feure chose to exhibit.¹¹⁷

De Feure had developed a highly personal, original approach to the genre that may best be described as Art Nouveau landscape painting. It distanced itself from Impressionism and Neo-Impressionism on one hand and the reactions against these movements by Gauguin and the Pont-Aven Group and the Nabis on the other, yet the common factor underlying all these disparate currents was the impact of Japanese art. De Feure, according to Piaux, 'has applied the marvellous technique of the Japanese to the European landscape, and has created a new style'.¹¹⁸ The critic then went on to describe his method of working: 'The tones are worked in watercolors. Whatman and Bristol paper become the palette of the artist, and on them he mixes, dilutes, shades off, and works his colors, here leaving a spot clear white, there laying on thickly with *gouache*'.¹¹⁹ A good number of the landscapes listed in the catalogue were views of Bois-le-Roi, where de Feure had a cottage (cat. 54, fig. 31) and the nearby Forêt de Fontainebleau which inspired many of his woodland scenes (cat. 52). Mourey considered that his approach to nature in his landscapes continued to be Baudelairean while Ruffe and an

anonymous critic writing in *The Studio* felt that their atmosphere evoked Shakespeare's plays.¹²⁰ In a similar vein, Thiébault-Sisson and Piaux likened his handling of space and perspective to that in opera and theatre décors respectively.¹²¹ Like a stage set, space is reduced to three or four clearly defined flat planes. While the first acts as a border to the work, each successive plane partly closes the perspective until the last one, lighter in colour, completes it. Such a structuring of space was probably the legacy of the period spent as an actor during his youth, and is employed in works as fundamentally different as *Vision rouge* (cat. 3) and *Château dans la forêt* (cat. 53).

In addition to these pure landscapes, de Feure exhibited 'scenes of modern life on the race courses' and 'fantasies on feminine motifs' such as *Fleur d'automne* (cat. 48, fig. 32).¹²² In such works, his women are no longer the mysterious and daunting creatures of his Symbolist work, but have been transformed into 'graceful queens of fashion'.¹²³ The psychological dimension and various aspects of the feminine mystique evoked in earlier works have all but disappeared. The female presence now has primarily an ornamental function, with the accent being placed on the decorative qualities of her clothes and accessories. She is no longer observed in close-up, but is placed at a distance, in full figure, with the long and intricately patterned train of her gown fanning out behind her like the tail of a peacock. A scarf or boa trails from her shoulders, describing gently flowing curves. The same purely emblematic representation appears in de Feure's last artistic posters - *Thermes Liégeois Casino* (cat. 67), *La Dépêche*, and *Lily of France Corsets* - thus resolving the duality which had existed between the image of women in his Symbolist compositions and his artistic posters since 1894.

The transformation in his image of woman is both the result of his activities as an Art Nouveau designer creating furniture and other interior designs for the fashionable *fin de siècle* woman and the reflection of the declining fortunes of Symbolism. When Piaux wrote, at the time of the de Feure retrospective at L'Art Nouveau Bing, 'always it has been the pure, decorative beauty, never the sensual, degenerate side, which he has lovingly treated', it was not only a response to an actual change in de Feure's art, but also an attempt to rewrite the past and deny that he had ever been associated with the Symbolist milieu or shared their negative and misogynistic attitudes.¹²⁴ Similarly, Gerdeil, having admitted that de Feure had belonged to the group of painters associated with *La Plume* who suffered from what he called 'acute gynophobitis', then found reason to excuse him: 'Despite several somewhat wild little paintings, and a few series of *Femmes damnées* by Beaumalaire (sic), I rather believe that he was only marginally involved and that, in the end, his theories on the *éternel féminin* see above all in women the pretext for purely decorative images'.¹²⁵ These attempts to dissociate de Feure from Symbolism indicate the degree to which the movement had become unfashionable, but it would be just as erroneous to imagine that all trace of

Symbolist themes and the influence of Baudelaire had disappeared from de Feure's art, as it would to believe Puaux and Gerdeil that they had hardly been present, if at all.

A good number of artists designed their own picture frames, and as a Symbolist painter and Art Nouveau decorator, it was only natural that de Feure should do the same. The search for complete visual harmony during the 19th century had been pushed to its logical conclusion by Whistler with the transformation of the complete interior of a dining-room into an extended picture frame for his *Princesse au pays de la porcelaine*. Whereas the Impressionists and Neo-Impressionists painted their frames for optical reasons, the Symbolists operated from an aesthetic standpoint, concerned with the creation of a total work of art where, in addition to being purely decorative, the frame could also function as a complement to, or extension of the subject. Curiously, de Feure seems to have only rarely personalised his frames during the Symbolist period, as with *L'Abîme* (cat. 9) and *La Fée Caprice* (cat. 18, fig. 33), but this may well be the result of the original frames having subsequently been lost. As an Art Nouveau decorator working for Bing, he produced a number of designs for frames suitable for mass manufacture (fig. 34) and capable, according to Mourey, of 'lending themselves to the different combinations that the format of a painting imposes, of being able to frame well canvases of diverse colours and subjects'.¹²⁶ His frames were thus intended to be able to accept 'a canvas by Claude Monet, or Renoir as well as a portrait by Blanche or an antique landscape by Ménard' in addition to his own works.¹²⁷ Apart from the obvious commercial considerations, de Feure's approach to the question of picture frames reflects the logical development of his aesthetics of interior design. In a manner directly opposed to Whistler's Peacock Room, de Feure's frames are designed to be an intrinsic part of his interiors, serving to integrate the paintings, regardless of artist, into them.

The End of an Era

Although the retrospective exhibition at L'Art Nouveau Bing was widely appreciated and had almost as much impact as his contribution to the pavilion at the Exposition universelle, it was in many respects a swansong to the venture. L'Art Nouveau Bing had achieved critical acclaim, but it was less fortunate financially. The enormous cost of the pavilion at the Exposition universelle had been financed out of Bing's personal fortune, because 'he could neither claim awards nor receive financial aid from the French government'.¹²⁸ The exclusive designs and the craftsmanship of their execution meant that the prices were beyond the reach of all but a rich and enlightened few. In his introduction to the catalogue of the exhibition *Les Rénovateurs de l'Art appliquéd* 1890 à 1910, which was held in 1925, Chapoullié looked back on the enterprise and explained: 'Unfortunately, Bing and his artists, because of their

consciousness and tenacity, incessantly modified and improved, and a chair came to cost several thousand gold francs, which made it practically unsaleable'.¹²⁹ As early as 1902, Frantz, who had previously praised de Feure in *Le Figaro illustré*, now attacked him for an 'armchair in gilded wood, with extremely refined carving, which is nothing more than a collector's piece, a precious object no doubt within the reach of only a very few art lovers'.¹³⁰ In order to avoid having too large an investment in a stockpile of items, furniture was made to order, with the customer choosing from an album of photographs of finished prototypes together with their prices.¹³¹ This may have helped limit overheads, but not sufficiently.

The Exposition des Oeuvres de Georges de Feure, given its critical success, may have been an attempt to rekindle interest or simply to dispose of stock, but on a financial level it was not a success.¹³² L'Art Nouveau Bing struggled on for another year. There was an exhibition at the gallery entitled *Trois Maîtres japonais*, and even a small pavilion with designs by de Feure at the Première Exposition de L'Habitation at the Grand Palais in Paris, but the enterprise was virtually finished. In relating the events of this period, Raymond Koechlin, a friend of Bing and fellow collector of oriental art, remarked that despite the critical success at the 1900 Exposition universelle 'the public, nevertheless, was not ready for it, and Bing had the same outcome as most precursors; after several years, tired and poorer, he had to give up'.¹³³ When Bing's empire finally floundered, in June 1904, de Feure seems to have been taken by surprise. On 14th June he wrote to Tadamasa Hayashi, the most important Japanese collector of Impressionist painting and associate of Bing, 'I left the Bing firm in an unexpected manner - I find myself momentarily very short of money'.¹³⁴ Colonna and Gaillard had already left L'Art Nouveau Bing the previous year, apparently disgruntled by Bing's favouritism for de Feure.¹³⁵ Only Bing knew the true financial state of his enterprise and it may well have been another problem with de Feure that precipitated his decision to abandon the cause.¹³⁶ In any event, by 4th July, the premises at 22, rue de Provence belonged to Majorelle Frères of Nancy and what was left of L'Art Nouveau Bing was auctioned on 19th and 20th December 1904 at L'Hôtel Drouot.¹³⁷

L'Art Nouveau Bing was now a thing of the past and the death of Bing on 6th September 1905, the very day of de Feure's 37th birthday, placed a final seal on this era.

In looking back on the *fin de siècle* period we can see it as a golden age of artistic innovation and de Feure, at the height of his creative powers, one of its outstanding figures. Whether inspired by the evocative power of the poetry of Baudelaire or Bing's vision of a renaissance in the applied arts and a revival of the old French tradition, from the intellectual sophistication of his Symbolist paintings to the refined elegance of his decorative designs, de Feure displays his exceptional talent of giving eloquent form to what they imagined.

Notes

1. Louis Vauxcelles, *De Feure*, unsigned and undated manuscript in the *Fonds Louis Vauxcelles*, Carton No. 180 at the Bibliothèque d'Art et Archéologie, Paris.

2. Henri Frantz, 'Georges de Feure', *Le Figaro illustré*, No. 119, February 1900, p. 44.

3. *Extrait des Registres d'Etat civil du XVIe Arrondissement de Paris. Actes de naissances 1.1. 1868-19.9.1868*, No. 737, 7 September 1868, Georges Joseph Van Sluyters. V4E 1957. Archives de Paris.

4. See *Extrait des Registres des Actes de Mariage du IIIe Arrondissement de Paris 1859*, No. 501, 13 September 1859, Jan Hendrik Van Sluyters (*sic*) et Charlotte Françoise Josephe Maréchal. Archives de Paris.

5. Octave Uzanne, 'On the Drawings of M. Georges de Feure', *The Studio*, No. 12, November 1897, p. 102.

6. *Relevé des Bâtiments signés*, Archives de Paris. Among the Van Sluyters buildings were those constructed for the Comte van Seebach at 31, rue de Courcelles, Comte de Riant at 14, avenue Kléber, Baron Adelswärd at 42, rue de la Bienfaisance and Baron Van Zuylen Nijeveldt at 5, rue Rougemont.

7. See *Archieven Notaris Wanring*, Acte 4534, 5 September 1872, Notariële Archieven van 's-Gravenhage, inv. No. 21.29, Gemeentelijke Archievendienst 's-Gravenhage; *Vonnissen van de Tweede Kamer*, No. 202. Processe-Verbaal van Faillissementen 1881, No. 1761, 14 December 1881. Archief van de Arrondissementsrechtsbank, Amsterdam. Algemeen Rijksarchief, Hulpdepot van de Rijksarchiefdienst, Arnhem-Schaarsbergen.

8. See *Bevolkingsregister van Hilversum 1879-1894*, Blad 2947, 18 April 1883.

9. Uzanne, *op. cit.* (note 5).

10. *Ibid.* In the French version of the article, 'Les Maîtres de l'estampe et de l'affiche: M. Georges de Feure', *Le Monde moderne*, February 1898, p. 272, the business house was in Hilversum and not Utrecht, while the forwarding agents was in Amsterdam instead of Dordrecht. One may speculate as to whether these were corrections given by de Feure himself to Uzanne following the publication of his article in *The Studio*.

11. Vauxcelles, *op. cit.* (note 1).

12. *Stamregister van Leerlingen van de Rijksacademie voor Beeldende Kunsten voor den cursus jaar 1886-87*. Archief Rijksacademie, Nos. 175.99.940 and 175.204.904, Rijksarchief in Noord-Holland, Haarlem.

13. Octave Uzanne, *op. cit.* (note 5), p. 102.

14. *Extrait des Registres d'Etat civil du IXe Arrondissement de Paris. Actes de Naissance 1890*, No. 1085, 20 July 1890, Jean Corneille Van Sluyters. Mairie du IXe

Arrondissement de Paris.

Extrait des Registres d'Etat civil du XVe Arrondissement de Paris. Actes de Décès 1894, No. 33, 3 January 1894, Jean Corneille Van Sluyters. Mairie du XVe Arrondissement de Paris.

Extrait des Registres d'Etat civil du IXe Arrondissement de Paris. Actes de Naissance 1891, No. 1661, 25 October 1891, Pierre Louis Van Sluyters. Mairie du IXe Arrondissement de Paris.

De Feure was not the first in his family to have illegitimate children, his elder sister Marie Anne having had two daughters in the late 1880's. De Feure also at first pretended that his mistress was twenty-one (she was, in fact, nineteen).

15. André Warnod, *Bals, Cafés et Cabarets*, Paris 1913, p.132 and Jean Emile-Bayard, *Montmartre hier et aujourd'hui*, Paris 1925, p. 24. Also see Horace Valbel, *Les Chansonniers et les Cabarets artistiques*, Paris 1895, p. 96.

16. After the death of Salis, the *Collection du Chat Noir 'Rodolphe Salis'*, sold at Hôtel Drouot on 16th-20th May 1898, included a series of four drawings by de Feure as No. 179. For works by de Feure exhibited at L'Anse Rouge, see *Le Courier français*, No. 18, 30 April 1893, p.10 and Valbel, *op. cit.* (note 15), p.299.

17. Concerning the 'Groupe Desboutin', see Georges de Feure, *Souvenirs inédits*, Transcription by Henri Bourgeaud. Archives Henri Bourgeaud (as yet unclassified), Département de Musique, Bibliothèque nationale, Paris. Among the programmes designed by de Feure that still exist are those for *Thermos-Victus* (that he also wrote) with *Cadavres* by André Mycho, and *Pierrot-Diogène*, also by the artist. Unfortunately, there was no reference to this group's activities in Geneviève Aitken, *Artistes et Théâtres d'Avant-Garde, programmes de Théâtre illustré 1890-1900*, 1991. The artist's ties with the theatre would be further strengthened when he designed the stage sets for *Elén* by Villiers de L'Isle-Adam at the Théâtre Libre in February 1895. Similarly, de Feure executed the décors for a programme of recitals, operettas and pantomimes organised by *Le Journal* in the Salons du cercle de l'Union franco-américaine in March 1896.

18. Léon Riotor, 'Le Salon de La Plume 2: Georges de Feure', *La Plume*, No. 81, September 1892, p.387.

19. *Ibid.*

20. Arsène Alexandre, *L'Art du rire et de la caricature*, Paris, 1892, p.336.

21. Riotor, *op. cit.* (note 18).

22. Uzanne, *op. cit.* (note 5), p. 99.

23. The earliest literature on posters discussing de Feure is Charles Hiatt, *Picture Posters*, London 1895 and Ernest Maindron, *Les Affiches illustrées 1886-1895*, Paris 1896. Neither mentions the name of Chéret in relation to the

artist. J.L. Sponsel, *Das Moderne Plakat*, Dresden 1897, p. 38 speaks of the influence of Chéret on one of de Feure's posters, while Walter von Zur Westen, *Reklamekunst*, Bielefeld and Leipzig 1903, p. 35 placed de Feure under the 'banner' of Chéret. It is most probable that at some point the idea of de Feure belonging to the 'Chéret school' was translated as him literally being his pupil.

24. Uzanne, *op. cit.* (note 5), p. 102.

25. De Feure had exhibited a portrait of Paul Adam 'très convenable en Robert Macaire, avec dans le dos, les armes de la Rose+Croix' in the exhibition *Portraits du prochain siècle*, which had been held at the Galerie Le Barc de Boutteville in autumn 1893.

26. The *Supplément de la Revue encyclopédique*, No. 213, October 1897, p. 76 gives 20th December 1891 as the opening date for the first of Le Barc de Boutteville's exhibitions.

27. De Feure only exhibited in the second, third and fifth of Le Barc de Boutteville's exhibitions and the second and third Salons de la Rose+Croix. This period covered just two years, from May 1892 to May 1894.

28. G.-Albert Aurier, *Le Symbolisme en peinture. Van Gogh, Gauguin et quelques autres. Textes réunis et présentés par Pierre-Louis Mathieu*, Caen 1991, pp. 26-27.

29. Mirliton, *Journal Revue: Troisième Exposition des Peintres impressionnistes et symbolistes*, *Le Journal*, 26 November 1892, unpaginated.

30. 'Aquarelles de M. Lefèvre' (*sic*), *L'Art Français*, No. 362, 31 March 1894, unpaginated.

31. *Ibid.*

32. Jean Pierrot, *L'Imaginaire décadent*, Paris 1977, pp. 155-157.

33. Camille Mauclair, 'Choses d'art: exposition Georges de Feure', *Mercurie de France*, May 1894, p.93.

34. Frantz, *op. cit.* (note 2), p. 41.

35. Charles Baudelaire, *Oeuvres complètes*, Paris 1963, p. 1288.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 1272.

37. Pierrot, *op. cit.* (note 32), p. 150.

38. Baudelaire, *op. cit.* (note 35), pp. 1249-1250.

39. Uzanne, *op. cit.* (note 5), p. 100.

40. Hiatt, *op. cit.* (note 23), p. 24.

41. Frantz, *op. cit.* (note 2), p. 42.

42. G. M. Jacques, 'Exposition universelle. L'Art Nouveau Bing', *L'Art décoratif*, No. 21, June 1900, p. 95.

43. Julius Meier-Graefe, 'L'Art français moderne: M. G. de Feure', *L'Art décoratif*, No. 2, November 1898, p. 50.

44. See the *Catalogue du Salon de la Société nationale des Beaux-Arts 1897, section objets d'art*, nos. 240-241 and 1898 *section objets d'art*, No. 448 no. 5.

45. Undated publicity circular, private collection, Paris.

46. *Ibid.* Claire Frèches-Thory, in her essay on the Nabis and decorative art in the exhibition catalogue *Nabis 1888-1900*, Grand Palais, Paris, 1993, pp. 358-359, contends that Marty actually opened a shop called L'Artisan Moderne at 7, rue Racine. However, the whole marketing strategy of L'Artisan Moderne was based on reducing overheads to a minimum precisely by not having a shop, and Marty himself explained how all the objects edited by his enterprise 'ont déjà pu être fabriqués et mis en vente sans autre magasin que notre propre bureau de travail'. As the publicity brochure issued from his office at 58, boulevard des Batignolles proclaimed: 'L'Artisan Moderne n'a pas de magasin de vente spécial'. In fact, the premises at 7, rue Racine were those of the poster and print dealer Arnould, one of the accredited outlets for Artisan Moderne designs.

47. *Ibid.*

48. *Catalogue du Salon de la Société nationale des Beaux-Arts 1897, section objets d'art*, nos. 240-241.

49. The correspondence in the collection of M. Jean-Edouard Gautrot spans the period from 1895, when de Feure was living on the rue Navarin, to late 1897 when he was installed on the rue Boissy-d'Anglas, just off the place de la Concorde, but most of it dates from December 1897 following the Salon. The information which can be gleaned from it is limited: de Feure produced lithographic designs for L'Artisan Moderne (probably the lampshade exhibited here and referred to by Marty in his prospectus); there were meetings of those involved in the association and the workshops were in Asnières to the west of Paris.

50. For a detailed account of Bing and Art Nouveau, the author of the present catalogue can but refer the reader to Gabriel P. Weisberg's monumental study: *Art Nouveau Bing, Paris Style 1900*, New York 1986.

51. Gabriel P. Weisberg, 'A Note on S. Bing's early years in France 1854-1876', *Arts Magazine*, Vol. LVII, No. 5, January 1983, p. 85.

52. Gabriel P. Weisberg, 'L'Art Nouveau Bing', *Arts in Virginia Bulletin*, Vol. XX, No. 1, Autumn 1979, p. 9.

53. Gabriel P. Weisberg, *op. cit.* (note 50), p. 48.

54. Invitation card to the opening of L'Art Nouveau. Carton Vert (Gal 86), Bibliothèque d'Art et Archéologie, Paris.

55. See Nancy Troy, 'Toward a Redefinition of Tradition in French Design, 1895 to 1914', *Design Issues*, Vol. I, No. 2, Autumn 1984, pp. 53-69.

56. Edmond de Goncourt, *Journal*, Vol. XXI, pp. 156-157.

57. Arsène Alexandre, 'L'Art Nouveau', *Le Figaro*, 28 December 1895.

58. Siegfried Bing, 'L'Art Nouveau', *The Architectural Record*, Vol. XII, August 1902, p. 281.

59. *Ibid.*, p. 283.

60. *Ibid.*

61. *Ibid.*, p. 285.

62. Viviane, 'L'Art Nouveau', *La Revue illustrée*, No. 14, 1 July 1900, unpaginated. Also see Weisberg, *op. cit.* (note 50), pp 142-157.

63. Concerning the exhibition of Colonna's jewelry and this period of Colonna's career in general, see Martin Eidelberg, 'The Life and work of E. Colonna, Part 2: Paris and L'Art Nouveau', *The Decorative Arts Society Newsletter*, Vol. VII, No. 2, June 1981, pp. 1-10. In the *Album de références de L'Art Nouveau* at the Bibliothèque des Arts décoratifs, Paris, there is a design (no. 49) for a 'Bureau de dame Mod. G' which is signed and dated 'E G juin 97'. Eugène Gaillard had been a student at the Ecole des Arts décoratifs in Paris where he had won First Prize for Comparative Anatomy two years running, in 1887-1888 and 1888-1889. See *Archives de l'Ecole des Arts décoratifs*, AJ5391, Archives nationales, Paris.

64. Marc Croisilles, 'Georges de Feure', *La Revue artistique et industrielle. L'Art dans la vie*, Vol. VII, May 1901, unpaginated.

65. Jacques, *op. cit.* (note 42), pp. 95-96.

66. Gabriel Mourey, 'L'Art Nouveau de M. Bing à l'Exposition universelle', *La Revue des Arts décoratifs*, Vol. XX, Part 1, August 1900, p. 257.

67. *Ibid.* and F. Hamilton Jackson, 'The New Art' as seen at the Paris Exhibition', *The Magazine of Art*, 1901, p. 127.

68. *Ibid.*

69. Weisberg, *op. cit.* (note 50), p. 185.

70. Mourey, *op. cit.* (note 66), p. 265.

71. *Ibid.* Part 2, September 1900, p. 280.

72. G. M. Jacques, 'L'Intérieur rénové', *L'Art décoratif*, No. 24, September 1900, p. 223.

73. Mourey, *op. cit.* (note 66), Part 1, p. 265, and Part 2, p. 278.

74. *Ibid.*, Part 1, pp. 266-267 and Viviane, 'L'Art Nouveau: au pavillon de l'Art Nouveau S. Bing à l'Exposition', *La Revue illustrée*, No. 17, 15 August 1900, unpaginated.

75. G. M. Jacques, *op. cit.* (note 42), p. 96.

76. Viviane, *op. cit.* (note 74) and Mourey, *op. cit.* (note 66), p. 279.

77. *Ibid.*

78. Gabriel Mourey, 'Round the Exhibition. 1. The House of the «Art Nouveau Bing»', *The Studio*, Vol. XX, August 1900, pp. 177 and 180.

79. G. M. Jacques, *op. cit.* (note 72), p. 223.

80. *Ibid.*

81. *Ibid.*, p. 224.

82. Gabriel Mourey, 'George de Feure - Paris', *Innen-Dekoration*, No. 13, January 1902, p. 15.

83. E. B., 'Künstler-Seide von Deuss und Oetker in Krefeld', *Die Kunst*, October 1902, pp. 59-62. Concerning Lamy and Bornet in Lyon, see Gabriel P. Weisberg, 'Siegfried Bing and Industry: The Hidden Side of Art Nouveau', *Apollo*, Vol. CXXVII, November 1988, No. 321, pp. 326-329.

84. *Ibid.* Also see Jean Emile-Bayard, *L'Art de reconnaître les styles: Le Style moderne*, Paris 1919, p. 229 and 231. Examples of de Feure's wallpaper designs for the Atelier Forrer were reproduced in the *Album de la décoration*, Vol. II, plates 36 and 47.

85. Gabriel P. Weisberg, *op. cit.* (note 50), p. 188.

86. Eidelberg, *op. cit.* (note 63), p. 3.

87. *Ibid.*

88. *Ibid.*

89. Weisberg, *op. cit.* (note 50), p. 190.

90. De Feure does not appear in the *Didot-Bottin* at this address before 1902. A visit card for the 'Atelier de Feure' dated 3rd August 1901 is to be found in the collection of the Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet, ref M.N.R. Béta 580. De Feure was, however, listed as being at this address in April 1901 in the *objets d'art* section of the *Catalogue du Salon de la Société nationale des Beaux-Arts*, page LII.

91. The 'Atelier de Feure' appears for the last time in the *Didot-Bottin* of 1905 p. 3208. However, a letter by de Feure dated 5th January 1905 already gives his address as 160, boulevard Malesherbes, see the archives *Publieke Werken 1905/51, Algemene Zaken 1905/78*, Gemeentearchief, Amsterdam.

92. 'Chronique', *L'Art décoratif*, No. 31, April 1901, p. 41.

93. 'Supplément', *Art et décoration*, April 1901, unpaginated.

94. See the letters from Georges de Feure to Léon Deschamps dated 12th April 1899 and 27th April 1899, M.N.R. Béta 579, Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet, Paris.

95. Photographs of furniture from the 'Atelier de Feure' were among the documents of the Art Nouveau period located in the Léon Jallot archives belonging to Maître Hervé Poulain, Paris.

96. Letter from Bing to Deneken dated 5th April 1905, Archives, Kaiser Wilhelm Museum, Krefeld. Quoted in Weisberg, *op. cit.* (note 50), p. 234.

97. See 'Chronique', *L'Art décoratif*, No. 1, October 1898, p. 48.

98. This information can be read on a plaque in the entrance to the restaurant visible on a period photograph. See *Architektonische Monatshefte*, No. 7, 1901, plate 88. Also see G. M. Jacques, 'Un restaurant allemand à Paris', *L'Art décoratif*, No. 38, November 1901, p. 54.

99. L. Macht, 'Bruno Möhring', *Berliner-Architekturwelt*, Sonderheft 2, 1902, pp. 28-31 and Jacques, *op. cit.* (note 98), pp. 57-59.

100. "Vereinigung Berliner Architekten", *Deutsche Bauzeitung*, Vol XXXV, No. 97, 1901, p. 604.

101. Jacques, *op. cit.* (note 98), p. 56.

102. *Ibid.*

103. *Ibid.*, p. 58

104. *Ibid.*, p. 59

105. *Ibid.*

106. *Ibid.*, p. 60

107. *Ibid.*

108. Mourey, *op. cit.* (note 82), p. 16.

109. Charles Torquet, 'La Vitrine de G. de Feure', *L'Art décoratif*, No. 33, June 1901, pp. 116-120.

110. *Journal officiel de la République française*, 9th August 1901 p. 5044: 'au grade de chevalier... Van Sluyters dit «de Feure» (Georges-Joseph) sujet néerlandais, artiste peintre décorateur'. See also *L'Art décoratif*, No. 36, September 1901 and particularly *Art et décoration*, Vol. XX, September 1901, 'Supplément', p. 2: 'Au grade de Chevalier: ... M. Van Sluyters, dit de Feure'. This is perhaps the first publication of de Feure's real name in a French art magazine.

111. Invitation card. Fichier Moreau-Nélaton, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

112. See 'Fransche Brieven', *Het Nieuws van den Dag*, 9th December 1901, p. 3 and O. Gerdeil, 'Un atelier d'artiste', *L'Art décoratif*, No. 40, January 1902, p. 144.

113. Publicity card dated September 1901. Collection Maciet, Bibliothèque des Art décoratifs, Paris. Also see *Art et décoration*, November 1901, 'Supplément', p. 2.

114. See the *Catalogue du Salon de la Société nationale des Beaux-Arts*, Paris, Grand Palais, section objets d'art, Nos. 86-89 and M.P. Verneuil, 'L'Exposition de l'Union centrale des Arts décoratifs', *Art et décoration*, Vol. XXII, September 1902, 'Supplément', pp. 2-3.

115. See, for example, Emile Sedeyn, 'A travers les expositions', *L'Art décoratif*, No. 53, February 1903, p. 58 and 'Studio Talk - Paris', *The Studio*, No. 120, March 1903, p. 137 as well as Gabriel Mourey, 'L'Exposition Georges de Feure', *Art et décoration*, Vol. XXIII, May 1903, pp. 162-164.

116. René Puaux, *Oeuvres de Georges de Feure*, Paris, no date (1903), p. 8.

117. It was not until 1934 that de Feure went against this trend by exhibiting a painting entitled *Exubérance* at the Salon d'Automne, catalogue No. 580.

118. René Puaux, 'An Appreciation of the Art of Georges de Feure', *Brush and Pencil*, April 1903, p. 104.

119. *Ibid.*

120. Mourey, *op. cit.* (note 115), p. 162; Léon Ruffe,

121. F. Thiébault-Sisson, 'Choses d'art: Le Salon des Pastellistes. L'Exposition de Feure', *Le Temps*, 4th April 1903, pp. 2-3; René Puaux, *Oeuvres de Georges de Feure*, Paris, no date (1903), p. 8.

122. Mourey, *op. cit.* (note 115), p. 163.

123. Puaux *op. cit.* (note 121), p. 8.

124. Puaux, *op. cit.* (note 118), pp. 102-103.

125. O. Gerdeil, 'Un atelier d'artiste', *L'Art décoratif*, No. 40, January 1902, p. 145.

126. Mourey, *op. cit.* (note 115), p. 164.

127. *Ibid.*

128. Weisberg, *op. cit.* (note 50), p. 172.

129. *Les Rénovateurs de l'Art appliqué de 1890 à 1910*, p. VII.

130. Henri Frantz, 'Le Meuble aux salons 1902', *Art et décoration*, Vol. XI, June 1902, p. 178.

131. This is the *Album de références Bing*, now in the Bibliothèque des Arts décoratifs, Paris.

132. A copy of the catalogue annotated by de Feure was in the possession of his niece, the late Mrs C.F. Van't Groenewout-Van Sluijters. At first glance it appears that everything was sold to major museums throughout the world, but verification proves otherwise.

133. Raymond Koechlin, *Souvenirs d'un vieil amateur d'art de l'Extrême-Orient*, Châlons-sur-Marne 1930, p. 48.

134. Letter from de Feure to Tadamasa Hayashi dated 14th June 1904, Tokyo National Research Institute of Cultural Properties, Tokyo, quoted in Weisberg, *op. cit.* (note 50), p. 259.

135. *Ibid.*, p. 261.

136. *Ibid.*, p. 224 and p. 270, note 15. Similarly, in a letter to Deneken dated 29th January 1901, Bing wrote: 'I immediately passed the catalogue on to de Feure for illustration. However, this man is a little unreliable and works in such a temperamental way that one is never very certain with him'. Archives Kaiser Wilhelm Museum, Krefeld.

137. See letter from Pierre Selmersheim to the Prefet de la Seine à L'Hôtel de Ville, Dossier *Permis de Construire* 22, *rue de Provence*, VO11 2851, Archives de Paris. See also Weisberg, *op. cit.* (note 50), p. 264 and p. 281, notes 17-18.

Catalogue

The catalogue is divided into three principal sections: Symbolist and Art Nouveau compositions, Graphic works and Decorative art. As far as possible, works are presented chronologically within each section. Among the original works, oils, watercolours and gouaches are presented together so that de Feure's often rapid stylistic evolution and thematic concerns can be clearly traced. The section on graphic art is subdivided into posters, lithographic prints and newspaper and book illustrations.
Dimensions are given in centimetres, height before width.



■ *Fig. 35*
The artist with his wife, Marguerite, and their daughter, Marguerite Edith at the 'Atelier de Feure', 1901-1902



1
L'Elégante et la lavandière
 (The Elegant Lady and The
 Washerwoman)
 1892-1893
gouache on paper, 32 x 43.5 cm
signed bottom right: de Feure
private collection

In his caricatural, Pre-Symbolist works, de Feure most frequently examined the latent antagonism between men and women or evoked the ambiguous relations between women themselves. From time to time, however, he treated other aspects of the social and moral climate, but always with a certain element of dry humour. *L'Elégante et la lavandière* is one such work, where the plain but virtuous washerwoman displays her jealousy and self-righteous indignation at the behaviour of the pretty young woman who has just returned from the city, having obviously profited from her good looks. In the facial expressions de Feure has finely rendered their respective attitudes of undisguised outrage and amused insouciance.

By its subject, the present gouache recalls a work entitled *Tentation* which was presented at the Salon carcassonnais in 1895. Writing in *La Revue méridionale* under the pseudonym Rozario, Albert Sarraut provided the following description: 'In the peaceful solitude of the meadows, a demi-mondaine shows off the insolent garishness of her outfit, obviously acquired by the daily and tariffed sacrifice of her charms to universal lust. Not far from her, sitting on a tuft of grass, a young and modest shepherdess follows this sinner with a jealous look kindled by a blaze of envy. For the vain possession of silky furbelows, the country girl might also accept to become the pleasurable flesh for feasts of vice, the courtisan who is despised and insulted -, in spite of the fact that the humane moralist Alphonse Allais said a woman who falls should never be insulted, even with a flower.'



2
Promenade d'automne
 (Autumn Walk)
 1892-1893
gouache on paper in the form of a fan,
22 x 44 cm
signed bottom right: de Feure
private collection

The femme fatale and sapphic love, two of the themes which would attain their fullest expression in de Feure's Symbolist work, appear in embryonic form in his early watercolours and gouaches, as well as in his newspaper illustrations. While the Pre-Symbolist treatment of the femme fatale is found in such newspaper illustrations as *Charité* (cat. 76), the present gouache exemplifies the early approach to lesbianism.

In an autumnal landscape, executed in a harmony of russet tones, two elegant women are walking hand in hand, seemingly oblivious of the labourer working in the background. He is digging a trench from which he has unearthed a skull and other bones, giving the scene the initial appearance of a

graveyard. Thus, de Feure integrates quite naturally into the foreground an element of a *vanitas*, recalling the transience of human life.

During this period, de Feure used class differences, bearing and dress to express the relations of superiority and inferiority, dominance and servility between men and women. Both Léon Riotor and Achille Astre described similar early works where the feeling of inferiority experienced by men is based as much on the women's sexual preferences as the social differences which make them unattainable.



3

Vision rouge

(Red Vision)

1892

gouache on paper, 36 x 54 cm

signed bottom right: *De Feure*
Collection Victor Arwas, London

This unusually shaped gouache occupies a key position in de Feure's early development as one of his first attempts to introduce Symbolist imagery at a time when, stylistically, he had not evolved beyond his Pre-Symbolist caricatural manner.

Despite the somewhat rudimentary approach to Symbolist subject matter and the specific nature of the action, de Feure's contemporaries were unable to identify any precise source for the

work, literary or otherwise, and remained perplexed as to its meaning. Indeed, when the work was presented at the third Exposition des Peintres impressionnistes et symbolistes organised by Le Barc de Boutteville in autumn 1892, it was greeted with incomprehension and derision. For example, a critic writing in *Le Journal*, noted ironically: 'the subject is so clear and understandable that we believe it unnecessary to explain further'.

To this day, the work remains enigmatic, open to a variety of interpretations. The severed hand and flash of lightning may be understood as symbolising, in general terms, the divine nature of the suffering and sacrifice of the

artist for his art, or, in mystical terms, the quest for spiritual enlightenment through literal or metaphorical self-mutilation.

That *Vision rouge* owes its origin and ultimate hermetism to some intensely moving personal experience such as a nightmare or drug-induced hallucination is suggested by the caricatured self-portrait as a twisted, screaming mask.



■ Fig. 36 Georges de Feure

Pierrot Assassin

1892

Indian ink on paper, dimensions unknown
whereabouts unknown



4

Avant la représentation

(Before the Performance)

c. 1893

gouache on paper, 35 x 24.5 cm

signed bottom left: De Feure
private collection

During the Pre-Symbolist period, de Feure's belief in the inherently antagonistic nature of relations between the sexes, symbolised by an encounter between rich and elegant city women and lowly, ragged labourers, included variations in approach that would ultimately emerge as the Symbolist concerns of the femme fatale, sapphic love and the 'Follower'.

However, these early years are also characterised by another theme which disappears entirely from the mature works, namely, travelling theatres, circuses and fairs, and the humble and precarious existence of their performers. De Feure's fascination with the subject may well have had its origins in memories of his family's wanderings during his childhood or the period he presumably spent as a youth in the middle or late 1880's with the

Frascati d'Art theatre group. Rather than concentrating on the lively and glittering circus ring which provided abundant source material for artists as diverse as Toulouse-Lautrec, Ibel, Tissot, Rochegrosse or Seurat, de Feure chose to depict the behind the scenes reality of hardship, squalor and despair. Rouault and Picasso are the most notable artists who also chose the pathos of the back stage.

In March 1894, the exhibition *Aquarelles par Georges de Feure* included, in addition to *Avant la représentation*, two works entitled *Forains*, but after this date the artist appears to have abandoned the theme. Perhaps, as with the posters for the café-concert, he had grown to consider the theme to be one of popular appeal and consequently incompatible with the intellectual sophistication of the Symbolist milieu.



5

Le Cirque Corvi

(The Corvi Circus)

1893

gouache and watercolour on paper,
39.5 x 40.5 cmsigned bottom left: De Feure
Sterling and Francine Clark Art
Institute, Williamstown

As was often the case during the Pre-Symbolist and early Symbolist periods, de Feure frequently re-used elements from one work or medium to another, so that the greater part of the present composition, including the seated woman and the chest bearing the initials R.I. appeared in the cover illustration to *Le Courrier français* on 25th June 1893 with the title *A la Fête de Neuilly - derrière la tente*, while the woman standing on the right was used both in the drawing reproduced as *Idylle parisienne* in the same newspaper on 23rd July 1893 and the lithographic print *Surprises*.

As with *Avant la représentation* (cat. 4), de Feure has chosen to focus on the reality of circus life away from the bright lights, but the exact significance to be attached to

the woman on the right remains uncertain. Various roles may be attributed to her, but it appears that her presence is unwelcome from the manner in which the performers seem to deliberately ignore her.

The title, *Le Cirque Corvi*, is somewhat inaccurate as this merely refers to the name of the circus which is just visible on a tent in the background. The artiste whose initials were R.I. has not yet been identified, but this couple of acrobats could represent almost any of those who performed annually at the Fair in Neuilly to the west of Paris.



6
Hypocrisie
(*Hypocrisy*)

1893
gouache on paper, 59 x 48 cm
signed bottom left: de Feure
private collection

The title of this work, like many of those presented at the Aquarelles par Georges de Feure exhibition in March 1894, such as *Angoisse*, *Cruauté*, *Ivresse*, *Névrrose* and *Vanité*, is a single word evoking a negatively connotated emotion, psychological state or behavioural pattern.

Three women, naked and pregnant, have been cast out by

town and church. Each reacts differently to society's and religion's condemnation of childbearing outside the sanctity of marriage: one young woman cries inconsolably, while the one standing on the right displays with indignation her swelling abdomen for all to see. The third, seated in the centre, cradles herself in her arms and holds her head high, a slightly sardonic smile playing on her lips. Despite public outrage at her behaviour, she maintains her self-pride and dignity.

In the background, on a bridge, a monk deliberately turns his back on them and sanctimoniously prays to heaven. A rainbow, its arching form recalling that of the bridge, cuts across the sky. In the Book of Genesis it is related how, after the Flood, God admonished Man to be fruitful and to multiply and, as sign of his covenant never again to smite life from the earth by water, placed a rainbow in the sky. While the rainbow represents a spiritual and eternal promise, the bridge which both links and opposes the monk and the three pregnant women may be understood as a material and temporal one.

The large, convoluted and richly coloured flowers in the foreground can be interpreted as the exteriorisation of Woman's sexuality and the expression of her fecundity. At the same time, they create a sort of visual intoxication and reinforce the feeling of unreality provoked by the symbolic and emotional use of colour and line.

The disdain for convention displayed in this work mirrors that in the artist's private life. Indeed, the significance of the work becomes more apparent when it is known that, at the time he painted it, de Feure was already the father of two illegitimate children. His choice of provocatively erotic and perverse subjects - here the scandalous representation of pregnant women and the Church as symbol of hypocrisy - would ultimately lead to one of his works being rejected by the Salon carcassonnais as 'shocking, against decent morality'.



7

Dans la dune

(In the Dunes)

1893

gouache on paper, 27 x 43 cm

signed bottom right: De Feure
Collection Gérard Lévy, Paris

When, writing in February 1900, Henri Frantz looked back over the first ten years of the artist's career and noted that 'in his earliest paintings, M. de Feure was so much under the influence of Baudelaire that most of the time he was content to paraphrase him', it may well have been with works such as *Dans la dune* and *Eventail symboliste* (cat. 8) in mind. *Les Fleurs du mal* had been a seminal work in the development of both literary and pictorial Symbolism in the late 19th century, and throughout the 1890's de Feure turned constantly to Baudelaire's writings, in particular *Les Femmes damnées*, in search of inspiration. The poem's theme of sapphic love was a crucial concern for both the poet and the painter and, indeed, may be viewed as one of the most complete and extreme expressions of

the Decadent aesthetic.

More often than not, as with *Dans la dune* and *Eventail symboliste*, the starting point is the opening lines of the poem in which Baudelaire describes the naked lesbians stretched beside the sea with their hands and feet touching as ruminating cattle gazing towards the horizon. However, with the exception of the works commissioned by Baron Vitta (cat. 29, 30 and 32), de Feure did not merely transcribe the imagery, but developed a series of variations, as here where a beam of moonlight focuses attention on a solitary couple.

The curious opening in the lower foreground resembling a cave or mine is an element which occurs throughout the 1890's in various works such as *L'Abîme* (cat. 9) and *L'Esprit du mal* (cat. 34) and may be interpreted as marking the entrance to the underworld of the subconscious and sexuality.



8

Eventail symboliste

(Symbolist Fan)

1893

gouache on paper in the shape of a fan, 37 x 72 cm

signed bottom centre: De Feure
Collection Raymond Toupenet, Paris

medieval walled city which recur in other works of this period such as *La Course à l'abîme* (fig. 12) and *Hypocrisie* (cat. 6).

As with *Dans la dune* (cat. 7), this gouache is indebted to Baudelaire's poem *Les Femmes damnées* from *Les Fleurs du mal*. Both the treatment of the landscape and the positioning of figures rather like cardboard cutouts contain, as do a number of these early Symbolist works, a distant echo of Puvis de Chavannes. However, the extent to which this influence has been assimilated and surpassed is particularly visible in his use of outline to delimit surface zones of flat, heightened colour. In this respect such works have a strong affinity with those of Gauguin and the Circle of Pont-Aven as well as Nabis such as Paul Ranson.

Like the underground opening in *Dans la dune*, de Feure introduces in the background of this gouache the symbols of a bridge and a

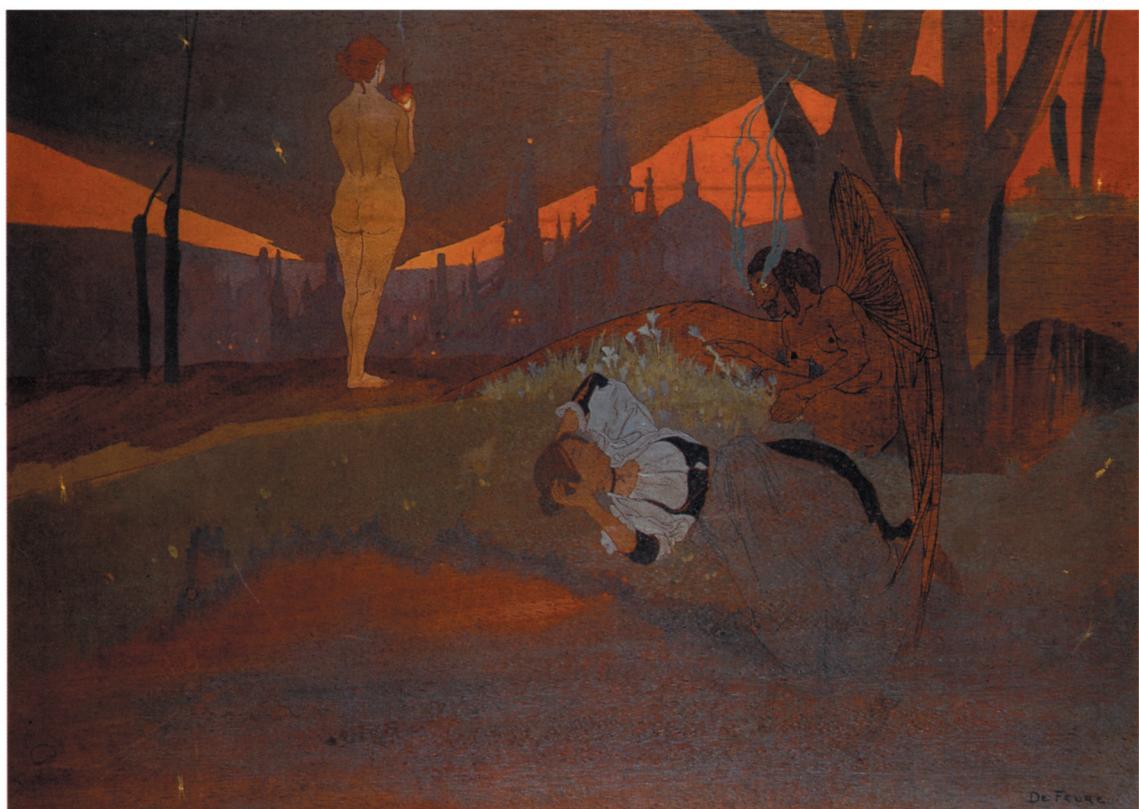
■ Fig. 37*Pierre Puvis de Chavannes**Vision antique*

1888-1889

oil on canvas, 105 x 133 cm

Museum of Art, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh





9
L'Abîme
(The Abyss)
1893-1894
oil on wood, 44 x 59.5 cm
signed bottom right: De Feure
private collection

When de Feure participated for the second and last time in the Sâr Péladan's Salon de la Rose+Croix in April and May 1894, he chose to be represented by a single work:

L'Abîme. The painting is one of the artist's earlier excursions into the oil medium. Like *La Voix du mal* (cat. 15), the undisguised bare wood of the support forms an integral part of the composition, but here it is accorded greater significance in the conception of the work.

The painting ostensibly offers a diabolic rendition of sapphic love. A female demon crouches close to a young girl sleeping on a grassy bank, encircling her with its wings. As this creature brushes aside some plants to gaze upon her body with malefic lust, ribbons of smoke trail upward from her incandescent eye sockets.

In the background, a naked woman stands facing the silhouetted spires and domes of a city stretched across the horizon. Before her she holds a glowing, smoking heart into which she has bitten while, like a cone of darkness seemingly emanating from her body, the night sky with twinkling stars obliterates the remaining light of day.

Carlos Schwabe had used the

symbol of the smoking heart in his poster for the first Salon de la Rose+Croix in 1892. This poster showed allegorical figures of Purity and Faith climbing a mystic staircase towards the Ideal while Humanity struggled hopelessly in the clinging morass of Materialism. Whereas in Schwabe's poster the smoking heart held by Purity was a traditional symbol of religious fervour and piety, in *L'Abîme* it has been savoured like a forbidden fruit, purity has been profaned and the spirit perverted. The smoke rising from the heart no longer symbolises fervour for religion and piety but, paralleling that streaming from the eyes of the demon, expresses the ardour of lesbian love and satanism. Far from two pure beings accompanying each other towards the Ideal, their physical passion leads them to a willing embrace of the abyss - *L'Abîme*. The repudiation of God and the divine order of things is suggested by the night sky, or powers of darkness seemingly emanating from the body of the naked woman, while the foreground, a formless thin grey wash over bare wood, is a void eating into the very fabric of reality.

on the edge of which the sleeping girl is precariously poised. Here and there, small twinkling stars are visible, not only in the sky and foreground emptiness, but also piercing through the landscape as if matter was evaporating. Similarly, the female devil is a true creature of the abyss, her body non-existent, nothing more than an outline drawn upon the bare wood of the support.

While the work functions perfectly as a Symbolist painting on the theme of sapphic love, it contains a deeper, more subtle and subversive statement on the artist's attitude towards the Sâr Péladan and his Salon de la Rose+Croix whose original aspirations were so eloquently visualised in Schwabe's poster.

■ Fig. 38 Carlos Schwabe
Salon Rose+Croix
1892
colour lithograph, 199 x 80 cm
private collection



10

Les Coeurs stériles

(Barren Hearts)

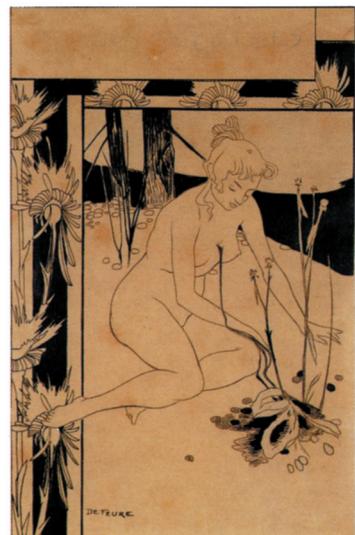
1893-1894

pencil, blue crayon and Indian ink on paper, 23 x 15 cm
signed bottom left: De Feure
private collection

By 1894, de Feure's growing involvement with the Symbolist movement led to a number of commissions to design the cover or provide a frontispiece for works by various literary figures. Generally, these were volumes of poetry and included *Le Pêcheur d'anguilles* by Léon Riotor, Alfred Mortier's *Vaine Aventure* and *Les Coeurs stériles* by Clément Rochel for which the present drawing is the original project.

The crouching naked female drawn in outline is typical of the artist's first Symbolist phase, but lacks the highly convoluted and sensual plant forms usually associated with such figures. De Feure visually renders the title explicit by portraying the withering effect of the blood from a woman's heart as it flows from a wound between her breasts. Rather than being a life-giving source of energy, it causes the plant before her to shrivel and die. Such negatively connotated images of women are characteristic of the misogyny prevalent in the Symbolist milieu.

De Feure seems to have been highly satisfied with the crouching female figure as he incorporated it in several other works, two of which are included in the present exhibition: *Dans la dune* (cat. 7) and *La Femme à l'iris* (cat. 28).



11

L'Artiste et son modèle

(The Artist and his Model)

1894-1895

gouache on paper, 37 x 57 cm
signed bottom left: De Feure
private collection

In a number of early works such as *Pierrot Assassin* (fig. 36) and *Vision rouge* (cat. 3), de Feure portrayed himself as an anguished and tortured being, mutilated and grimacing. With *L'Artiste et son modèle*, these nightmarish caricatures have given way to a moment of tranquility where the artist seeks inspiration from drawing himself and his model reflected in a mirror. The only element impinging on this feeling of calm is the large wave breaking in the background. There is an uncanny resemblance between this background and that of Emile Bernard's *Le Combat des chevaliers (Tournoi au crépuscule)*. In both, a

huge wave breaks against a rocky promontory whose summit is crowned by a castle or religious edifice which towers over the landscape. The similarity is so close that the right-hand side of the silhouetted castle in de Feure's painting is virtually identical to that in Bernard's. It is not known whether this resemblance is purely coincidental or not, or why de Feure should consciously copy such an element from another artist's work. In reference to Bernard's painting, it has been suggested that the source of inspiration was the Mont-Saint-Michel, yet the scene has little in common with the actual topography of the site.

■ Fig. 39 Emile Bernard
Le Combat des chevaliers (Tournoi au crépuscule)
1890-1892
oil on canvas, 71 x 93 cm
private collection





12

La Botaniste: Projet original pour l'affiche du Salon des Cent
(The Botanist: Original project for the Salon des Cent poster)
1894
gouache on paper, 91 x 72.5 cm
signed bottom right: De Feure
Collection George Bon Salle, Key Biscayne, Florida

This is the original gouache on which de Feure's poster for the fifth Salon des Cent was based (cat. 61). The poster with its modern, worldly and demonstrative female type, was in many respects a response to the idealised medievalising simplicity of Grasset's for the second exhibition which also portrayed a woman contemplating a flower (fig. 52).

However, whereas in de Feure's poster the strong-willed, decisive,

even artful character of the woman was simply suggested by the manner in which the woman held a rose, in *La Botaniste* the full extent of her malefic nature is made explicit and it is apparent that she is able to work magic through the deliberate manipulation of flowers. This notion recurs in other Symbolist works by de Feure, in particular the lithographic print *La Femme fatale* (cat. 72) and the painting *Marguerite*.

Here, a strange creature resembling a bird with a monkey's head clings to a plant stem on the left. Perhaps it is a human being who has fallen victim to the woman and has been transformed by her magic spell. It raises a foot as if to protect itself, staring with fear and alarm at the deadly flower in the woman's hand.



■ Fig. 40 Georges de Feure
Marguerite
1896
oil on canvas, 81 x 65 cm
private collection



13
L'Ecu du diable
 (The Devil's Coin)
 1894-1895
 signed bottom right: *de Feure*
 gouache on paper, 48 x 67.5 cm
 Collection Georges Evens, Antwerp

Among the solutions to the problem sexuality posed for the Decadents was that formulated by Baudelaire as 'The supreme and sole delight of love lies in the certainty of causing evil'. Rather than fall victim to one's physical and emotional needs and desires, love could be subverted and used as a means of bringing about someone else's downfall, the knowledge of which became in itself the source of pleasure and satisfaction. Thus, the Dandy could assert his superiority over Nature and escape her tyranny through a deliberate effort of willpower.

This notion of intellect and cold, calculating reason subjugating affection and spontaneous human warmth, or in common parlance, of

the head ruling the heart, is symbolised in *L'Ecu du diable* by the contrast between the claw or tooth decorating the man's forehead and the cross adorning the woman's breast. The evil nature of the man's intentions, already explicit in the title of the work, is further apparent in the quiffs of his hair that point upwards like the Devil's horns.

Here de Feure has abandoned his preoccupation with the Symbolist femme fatale for her counterpart of the early 19th century, the homme fatal of the Romantic period, the Byronian hero for whom women irresistibly fall. Achille Astre, writing in 1930, obviously had this gouache in mind when he described a work 'where all seductions are used to turn woman away from the path of virtue; dreamy, captivated by the gold that a charmer, a suitor or a noble lord flashes before her, she reels; she will succumb'.



14
Spleenétique
 (Spleenetic)
 1894-1895
 oil on canvas, 32 x 63.5 cm
 dedicated and signed bottom right:
Amicalement à Mr Bougard, De Feure
 private collection

Both Octave Uzanne, writing in *The Studio* in 1897, and Henri Frantz in *Le Figaro illustré* in 1900 described a painting representing a woman seated on a terrace during the autumn which had captivated them with its atmosphere of melancholy and unreality.

Although there are substantial differences between the present painting and that described at length by Uzanne, most notably in the absence of flowers in the woman's hair and the cloudy, day-time sky replaced by a clear, star-lit night,

there is sufficient similarity of theme and mood to imagine that it is a variant. Such variants are not unknown in de Feure's art of this period as *La Voix du mal* (cat. 15) and *Mélancolie* (cat. 16) attest.

Inspired as the title suggests, by the poetry of Baudelaire, this introspective, melancholic evocation of woman is close in mood to certain Symbolist works of the painter Aman-Jean, a friend of the poet Verlaine, who depicted wistful young women strolling or musing in sad autumnal parks.

■ Fig. 41
Edmond-François Aman-Jean
Seule
 1895-1896
 oil on canvas, 81 x 105 cm
 private collection





15
La Voix du mal
(The Voice of Evil)
1894-1895
oil on wood, 65 x 59 cm
signed bottom right: De Feure
private collection

At the Salon de la Société nationale des Beaux-Arts in 1895, de Feure exhibited five paintings which, perhaps in order to emphasise their decorative qualities, were presented in the *objets d'art* section. In a review of the Salon, Albert Sarraut commented favourably on these works for their quality and

originality, singling out for praise *La Voix du mal* 'where, behind a woman's face altered by the inner struggle of a tormented soul, frolic lascivious naked female sinners, inciters of unhealthy voluptuousness'. The combination of this theme of sapphic love with a single dominant female figure

situates the work on the cusp between the artist's first and second Symbolist phases.

An elegant, soberly dressed young woman is seated at her desk, lost in contemplation. Golden rings and bracelets are spread before her on the velvet cushion on which she rests her elbow; beside the cushion there is some writing paper, an inkpot and a feather pen. Her thoughts have been diverted from the writing she was on the point of starting by the inner voice that entices her with perverse sexual fantasies. These are visualised as two naked women languorously stretched in the landscape behind her. One is a dark-skinned female demon with horns protruding from her shock of fiery red hair. As she whispers to the woman beside her, she holds her hand to her left ear in a manner that echoes that of the main figure. As the title suggests, the main source of inspiration for the painting is the poem *La Voix* from Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal*. In the poem, a person is tempted by two voices, the second of which offers a voyage

'... into dreams,
Beyond the possible, beyond the
known'

The person, having finally succumbed to this voice, finds the world transformed and the order of things inverted. In *La Voix du mal*, the sexual dimension of the voyage has become the principal subject, treated in terms of the sapphic love implied by the inversion of natural order.

As in many of de Feure's works of the early 1890's, the use of succulent fruit and berries as symbols, not only of fertility but, above all, of unrestrained sensuality may be compared with Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights*. Here, the red berry cradled in the leaf close to the woman's ear corresponds to the red haired she-devil and suggests that her incessant whispering has born its perverse fruit, while the single luminous flower over the woman's head appears as a Symbolist paraphrase of the thousand petalled lotus of mystic enlightenment, the ultimate goal of this strange voyage.

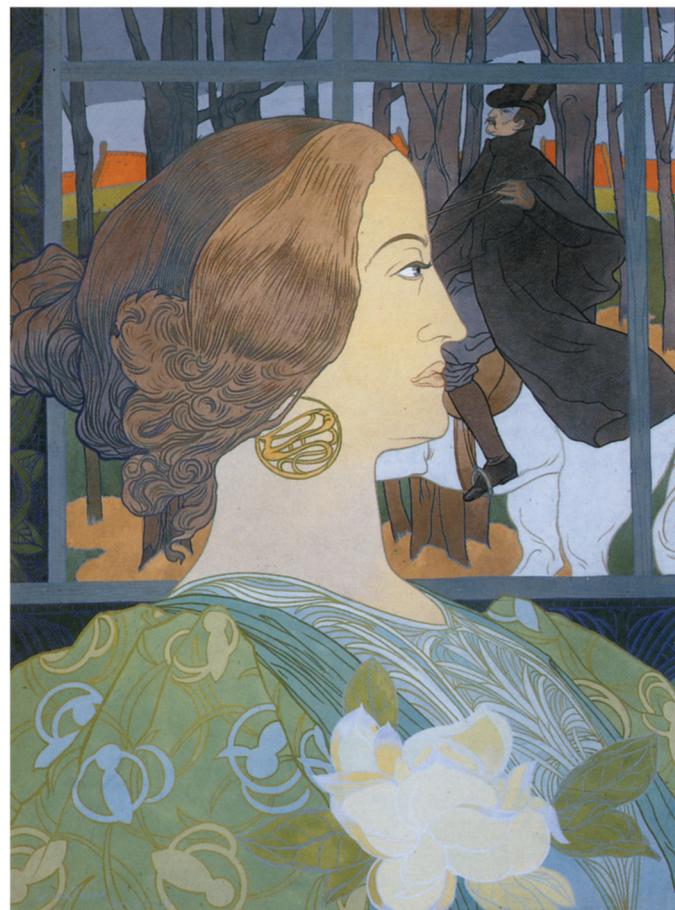


16
Mélancolie - La Voix du mal
 (Melancholy - The Voice of Evil)
 1895-1896
gouache on paper, diam. 53 cm
signed centre left: G Van Feuren
Collection Alain Lesietre, Paris

This, the only known tondo by de Feure, is signed G. Van Feuren, which indicates that it was executed during one of the artist's stays in Belgium in the period 1895-1896 and was probably intended for a Flemish client.

The work is also inscribed by the artist 'Fragment d'un tableau «La Voix du Mal»'. This inscription is somewhat erroneous in that de Feure has not simply copied a detail of the painting but has effectively created an entirely new work through the use of a different background and colouring. The pale, washed-out pink, mauve and blue capture perfectly the melancholic mood of the woman meditating on the memory of her lover, whose departure and its finality is symbolised by the bridge he is crossing.

The work is still in its original frame with pale blue embossed Japanese wallpaper in harmony with the dominant tones of the composition. Although the choice of a Japanese product in framing reflects a general trend in taste during the second half of the nineteenth century, it is also indicative of de Feure's awareness of Japanese art and its compatibility with his own.



17
L'Intruse
 (The Intruder)
 1895
gouache on paper, 45.5 x 31 cm
signed bottom left:
G Van Feure Bruges 95
private collection

Around 1894-1895, de Feure moved away from representing naked women in landscapes over which huge, multi-coloured flowers towered, towards works in which a single female figure dominated, as is the case here. In many of these works, she is seen in profile, surrounded by a swathe of flowers, while in the background is played out the imaginary scene of her thoughts, fantasies or misdeeds.

Ostensibly, the intruder of the title is the rather daunting woman in the foreground, disturbed in her rummaging through the owner's personal affairs by his unexpected return on horseback. However, there is sufficient ambiguity in de Feure's representation to allow an alternative interpretation as to the identity of the intruder. Given the accusing and hateful look on the woman's face and the self-satisfied manner in which the horseman shrugs this off, it is possible that the intruder is, in fact, the mistress he is riding off to meet.



18

La Fée Caprice
(The Fairy Caprice)

1895-1896

oil on canvas, 115 x 95 cm
signed bottom left: G Van Feure
Collection Raymond Toupenet, Paris

In 1896, de Feure continued his practice of exhibiting his oils in the *objets d'art* section of the Salon de la Société nationale des Beaux-Arts by presenting this canvas as a project for a tapestry under the title *La Fée Caprice*.

In a composition structured according to the precepts typical of his high Symbolist period, the artist has placed a single female figure in profile, surrounded by a border of luxuriant vegetation. Close to her lips, she holds a white rose on which a hovering bird is about to settle, while two large black birds with wings spread and serpentine tails are

perched above her head. Before her on an ornately carved table, a small doll dressed as a Dutch peasant rests against a vase.

Perhaps the most astonishing element is the knight in black armour in the background. With his helmet surmounted by a bird of prey, a death's head upon his breastplate, he holds his drawn sword in his left hand and the decapitated head of a young woman in the other, her long hair trailing far behind him on the ground. While a page tends to his horse, he pauses before advancing and presenting his ghastly trophy to the

woman contemplating her flower.

The painting may be read as a medievalised transcription of the legend of Perseus slaying Medusa and presenting the head to Minerva, the goddess of wisdom who had deprived her of her charms, particularly her beautiful hair which was transformed into hissing serpents. The knight's charger would, therefore, provide an allusion to Pegasus, the winged horse born of Medusa's blood, with the white flower referring to Minerva's unconquered chastity.

However, de Feure uses this mythological reference as a backdrop to illustrate the fickleness of Woman: by the time the knight has returned from his long and arduous quest, she has moved on to other amusements and he holds no more interest for her than the doll already abandoned beside her. Writing a review of the Salon in *La Plume* on 15th April 1896, Léon Maillard made the following commentary: 'De Feure has only one composition, but this year unpleasant spiders have not covered it with shadow, and one can judge to the full its decorative value, so complete in the troubled mind of the painter that the frame is ornamented with reminders in sober tones which are like preparatory explanations to the curious imaginative episodes which unfold around *La fée caprice* (sic). Everything is due to her and everything slips away from her, and the shining knight who desires her is discarded just like the doll, her latest toy, and the flowers, fruit and the diverse foliage which twist and gather in her mere presence. Such decorative wealth and so personal!'

If the painting, as the variant signature suggests, dates from de Feure's stays in Belgium in 1895-1896, the frame was executed during the same period, but in Paris where he shared his friend Marcellin Desboutin's address at 15, rue Bréda in Montmartre.



19

L'Ombre de Botticelli, ayez pitié de nous!

(Shadow of Botticelli, have Pity on Us!)

1895-1896

gouache on paper, 37 x 35 cm
signed bottom right: G Van Feuren
private collection

Thematically, *Le Suiveur* or 'Follower' as a man pursuing a real or imaginary woman is an evolution of the encounter situations that typified de Feure's early Pre-Symbolist newspaper illustrations and gouaches and appears to have crystallised during the middle of the 1890's when the artist made several visits to Bruges.

This gouache, apparently executed during one of de Feure's stays in the city, was subsequently lithographed and became the third plate of *L'Amour libre* (Free Love), a portfolio of four prints that was edited by Kleinmann. In April 1897, *L'Estampe et l'affiche* described the lithographic version as representing 'a courtesan with a pseudo-botticellesque profile who draws

along in her wake an aesthetic admirer'.

This caped figure stands forlorn in a park as the young woman hurries by with her shopping. She remains totally oblivious, as does the young boy dashing past with a parcel, of his suffering and supplication for her to have pity on him and to grant him her favours in return for an aesthetic rather than pecuniary appreciation of her beauty. Taking in this scene at a glance is a white-bearded old man. Between the heads of the old man and the bowler-hatted admirer there appears the statue of a naked young woman laying on her front with her feet kicked playfully in the air behind her. As in a strip cartoon, this figure visualises what is going through both men's minds.

However, de Feure shows his ability to transcend the banal, even sordid details of sexuality and prostitution to make an archetypal statement on love and the human condition.



20

Le Suiveur au crépuscule

(The Follower in the Twilight)

c. 1895

gouache on paper, 35.5 x 52.5 cm
signed bottom right: G De Feure
Collection S. Joel Schur

Here the theme of the 'Follower' takes on a sinister connotation as an attractive young woman flees from her pursuer. The farmhouse in the background appears to be deserted and there is no-one to help her as she makes her precarious escape over the ice of a partly frozen pond. There is something menacing, almost vampire-like, in the caped figure of the man silhouetted against the rising full moon whose palid light casts long and ominous shadows among the stark bare trees of winter. With its almost cinematographic composition, it sets a precedent for the quality cartoon strips and films of the present day.



21

Scène de Bruges la Morte

(Scene from Bruges la Morte)

1896

oil on canvas, 81 x 65 cm

signed bottom left:

G De Feure Bruges 96

private collection

When de Feure visited Bruges in 1896 to execute the designs to illustrate Georges Rodenbach's *Petites Nocturnes de Bruges* and his own lithographic album, *Bruges mystique et sensuelle* (cat. 75), he also painted a series of oils of similar size and format of which a number are included in the present exhibition.

Rodenbach was the author of *Bruges la Morte*, a celebrated Symbolist novel which relates how Hugues Viane encounters Jane Scott, a dancer who strangely resembles his late wife. However, unfortunately for Hugues, this resemblance is only superficial and it soon becomes apparent that Jane's personality has little, if anything, in common with his dead loved one.

The present work visualises the climax of the novel when Jane Scott

snatches a tress of Hugues' late wife's hair that he has treasured in her memory and taunts him with it, dangling it in front of his face and winding it around her neck like a boa. In the ensuing struggle, as Hugues tries to recover it, Jane is strangled.

Following Rodenbach's verbal imagery of the plait of hair as a charmed serpent, de Feure has visually transformed it into a writhing snake which Jane thrusts into Hugues' face in a derisive act of repudiation. The snow-covered roofs of Bruges visible through the window symbolise the sterility and futility of their relationship as much as its end.

The blood-stained peach on the table before Jane may be read as a symbol of sin and female sexuality while the coins, representing woman's base motivations, were also used in de Feure's cover design for Octave Uzanne's *Féminies* (cat. 79). Rarely do the Symbolist-Decadent fears of mockery, rejection and betrayal find a more lucid expression in de Feure's art than in this painting.



22

La Princesse Ylsdin

(The Princess Ylsdin)

1896

oil on canvas, 81 x 65 cm

signed bottom right:

G de Feure Bruges 96

private collection

During the 1890's, de Feure apparently wrote a Symbolist play, *Le Palais du silence*, that Frantz felt was the literary equivalent of much of the artist's painting. Indeed, this canvas could easily be the portrait of its principal character, Ylsdin, the 'princess of the mysterious Palace, with her nervous little hands and her impatient eyes who adorns herself like a flower... She is perfidious, inquisitive and cruel'. She is shown in profile, her cold and calculating personality expressed by her high forehead, sharp nose and chin, her thin, bloodless lips and heavy-lidded, half-closed eyes. Her malevolent nature is further accentuated by the funereal ribbons and flowers garlanding her blue-black hair. With a plucked flower held aloft in a gesture of evil triumph, for Frantz,

she personifies 'those who revel in lust and in blood, who are all heroines of crime and sensuality that the names of Messalina, Salome or Lucrezia Borgia evoke for us'.

■ Fig. 42 Jan Toorop

Dolce

1896

lithograph, 26.6 x 21.4 cm

Rijksprentenkabinet, Amsterdam



23
La Fille de Léda
 (The Daughter of Léda)
 1896
oil on canvas, 81 x 65 cm
signed bottom left: De Feure Bruges 96
private collection

In his search for subject matter, de Feure turned to any source which could be successfully adapted to his needs. Thus, during his stays in Bruges which were largely concerned with executing works related to the writings of Georges Rodenbach, de Feure also turned to mythology for inspiration.

Léda, after her seduction by Jupiter disguised as a swan, gave birth to an egg which contained the twins Castor and Pollux. Their sister was Helen, whose beauty was to cause the Trojan War. Rather than naming her as such, de Feure's choice of title places the emphasis on her parentage, while the swans in the background clearly refer not only to the form adopted by Jupiter, but also to the eternal triangle consisting of Helen, her husband Menelaus and Paris. In *The Tragical*

History of Dr. Faustus of 1588, the Elizabethan playwright Christopher Marlowe evoked Helen's fatal beauty with the words: 'the face that launched a thousand ships'.

In de Feure's painting, her incomprehension of her origins and her disastrous effect on men is conveyed by her upturned eyes and the manner in which she holds her head between her hands. She is the perfect example of the passive femme fatale in de Feure's art, described by Henri Frantz as 'the unconscious being predisposed to evil that fate leads towards perversity and involuntary vice'.

While this work and *La Princesse Ylsdin* (cat. 22) are among those most influenced by Synthetism, with their highly compressed perspective, flat zones of colour and thin but firm outlines, it is worth stressing the compositional similarity between *La Fille de Léda* and Toorop's lithograph *Dolce*, which dates from the same year.



24
Le Suiveur
 (The Follower)
 1896
oil on canvas, 81 x 65 cm
signed bottom right: De Feure
private collection

In his discussion of the Symbolist writings that de Feure drew upon, Gabriel Weisberg suggests as the source of the lithographic version of *L'Ombre de Botticelli, ayez pitié de nous!* (cat. 19) a synthesis of Rodenbach's *Bruges la Morte* and Baudelaire's poem *A une passante* from *Les Fleurs du mal*. While objections may be raised that in this specific work there is no reference to the canals which play such a prominent role in the life of the town and the statue of the naked woman with her feet playfully kicked in the air does not reflect the reverence in which Hugues Viane held his dead beloved, Weisberg has correctly identified the origins of the wider concept of the *Suiveur* or 'Follower' in de Feure's Symbolist art. On the one hand, Hugues Viane's pursuit of Jane Scott

through the streets and alleyways of Bruges provides a visual metaphor of the Dandy's incessant quest for the unattainable, while Baudelaire's poem, on the other, expresses the intensity of feeling that could jolt a man into following a woman:

*'A lightning flash... then night! -
 fleeting beauty,
 Whose glance caused me suddenly to be
 reborn,
 Shall I see you again only in eternity?
 Elsewhere, very far from here! too late!
 perhaps never!
 O you whom I could have loved,
 O you who knew it!'*

The *Suiveur* ultimately personifies the Decadent response to the problem of sexuality, where physical desire is sublimated through the admiration, at a distance, of a purely spiritual feminine figure.



25

Beguines à Bruges
(Beguin Nuns at Bruges)

1896

coloured pencil on paper,
37.5 x 25 cm
monogrammed bottom left
private collection

Among the projects undertaken during de Feure's stays in Bruges in 1896 was the execution of the designs to illustrate Georges Rodenbach's *Petites Nocturnes de Bruges*, which appeared in *L'Image* in May 1897, and his own lithographic suite *Bruges mystique et sensuelle* (cat. 75) which was published by Léon Deschamp's literary journal *La Plume* in 1898.

The present drawing is the original design for one of the lithographs from this album. Some difficulty exists in identifying each of the plates, partly because certain titles may equally apply to different images, and partly because the titles were, in fact, changed on a number of occasions. However, by its subject

of beguin nuns walking home along a canal in the twilight, it may be assumed that this work is the *Retour de vêpres* or *L'Eclipse, Bruges*.

From a technical point of view, de Feure experimented with the visual effect of a variety of textures in the different plates and, although in the completed lithograph the position of the figures has been somewhat modified, the fine grained surface of the present drawing was retained. Belonging to those plates evoking the mystical aspect of Bruges, the secretive, reclusive life of the beguines is reflected in the long, hooded capes they wrap themselves in.



26

Tubéreuse

(Tuberose)

1896

oil on canvas, 81 x 65 cm
signed bottom left: De Feure
private collection

Throughout the Symbolist and Art Nouveau period, de Feure's iconography was dominated by images of women associated with floral motifs. This fascination reached its logical conclusion around 1896 when de Feure started working on a series of women symbolising flowers which was to be published as a book under the title of *Féminiflores*. This series, his personal version of the Art Nouveau femme-fleur, was never published. Not only had widespread popularity rendered the theme banal and insipid, but also the necessity of giving a distinct interpretation to each flower was probably too restrictive and de Feure abandoned the project.

Tubéreuse is one of the few *Féminiflores* which are known today.

27

A Jeanne d'Arc

(To Joan of Arc)

1896

oil on canvas, 240 x 85 cm

signed bottom left: *De Feure*

Collection Victor Arwas, London

It was in 1891 at the Ane Rouge café-cabaret in Paris that de Feure met Achille Astre, a young man from Carcassonne who was to become a lifelong friend. After three years spent at the Magasins du Louvre, Astre returned to his home town and, with an associate named Sioux, set up a furnishing and home decoration store at 6, rue Victor Hugo under the name *A Jeanne d'Arc*.

In 1896, de Feure executed for Astre the present canvas and the corresponding poster (cat. 62). The painting most likely served as a shop sign, exhibited under thick glass on the outside of the store, while curiously the poster, de Feure's largest, was conceived explicitly as an interior decorative panel.

A Jeanne d'Arc is a simple but impressive composition and, as a portrayal of a saint, one of de Feure's most equivocal images. The standing figure, sword in hand, faces the spectator directly, but instead of a devout virgin inspired by a sense of holy mission de Feure has depicted a seductive young woman.

Jeanne's face, with its centrally parted deep brown hair, was inspired by Cléo de Mérode, hardly the most obvious or suitable model for a saint. Rather than obscuring her body and banishing all carnal thought, her armour, decorated with writhing filigree arabesques, sensuously hugs every curve, highlighting her femininity and sexuality.

Comparison with the poster designs by Mucha for Sarah Bernhardt is perhaps inevitable, but de Feure's debt to the Czech, if one exists, must be in terms of the large format and single female figure rather than one of style.



28

La Femme à l'iris

(Woman with an Iris)

1896-1897

oil on canvas, 81 x 65 cm

signed bottom right: *de Feure*
private collection

Although contemporary with the *Féminiflores* (cat. 26), it is unlikely that *La Femme à l'iris* belonged to the series, given the differences in style and the representation of woman. The model was Marguerite Guibert, whom de Feure married on 7th July 1897 at Charrois. At the same time she is holding in her hand the flower of the title, the rainbow in the background allows an identification with the goddess Iris.

In other works of this period, the association of women with voluptuous floral motifs is largely derived from Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal* and provides the starting point for an exploration of different facets of the feminine mystique ranging from her ambiguous sexuality to her perversity and esoteric power. Here, however, the iris serves primarily as the traditional attribute of the deity. Through this somewhat conventional symbolism, de Feure sensitively presents his future wife as a proud but demure beauty, a virtual goddess of physical perfection.



29

Aux lueurs des résines croulantes
(By the glimmer of spluttering resin)

1897-1898

gouache on paper, 35.5 x 26.5 cm
signed bottom right: de Feure
Collection Jean-Edouard Gautrot,
Paris

During the period when he was engaged in elaborating the illustrations and decorations for *La Porte des rêves* by Marcel Schwob (cat. 81), de Feure received from Baron Vitta a commission for a series of ten original gouaches, five of which are presented here. The similarity of style and obvious literary content meant that for a long time they were considered to be the original projects for the book. In fact, the majority of these works have been identified as having been inspired by poems from Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal*, in particular *Les Femmes damnées*. The degree of fidelity to the original source varies; some are so close that they may be considered to be literal transcriptions of the poet's verbal imagery, while

others appear to take one line or phrase as the starting point for a wider evocation. The present work faithfully renders the fourth stanza of *Les Femmes damnées*:

*There are some who, by the glimmer of spluttering resin
In the silent hollow of old pagan caverns,
Call for help in their howling fevers
To you, O Bacchus, soother of ancient remorse.*



30

Coeurs épris de longues confidences
(Hearts captivated by long confidences)

1897-1898

gouache on paper, 34 x 25 cm
signed bottom right: de Feure
Collection Jean-Edouard Gautrot,
Paris

The present composition is inspired by the imagery of the second verse of *Les Femmes damnées*, in which Baudelaire describes young women sharing their most intimate secrets with each other while strolling arm in arm:

*Some, their hearts captivated by long confidences,
In the depths of groves, singing with streams,
Spell out the love of timid childhoods,
And cut the green wood of young trees.*

This uncharacteristic representation in de Feure's Symbolist art of woman as an innocent, demure maiden recalls the evocation of womanhood as a symbol of purity and sincerity to be found in the art of Maurice Denis, inviting comparison in particular with his painting *Avril* of 1892 (Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, Otterlo).



■ Fig. 43 Maurice Denis
Avril
1892

oil on canvas, 38 x 61.7 cm
Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, Otterlo



31

Jardin des rêves
(Garden of Dreams)

1897-1898

gouache on paper, 34 x 25 cm

signed bottom right: de Feure
Collection Jean-Edouard Gautrot,
Paris

The most obvious source for this representation of a young woman dancing, naked beneath a long diaphanous robe, is the biblical story of Salome. The episode was treated by Oscar Wilde in his celebrated play in 1893, with controversial illustrations by Aubrey Beardsley.

Salome, the daughter of Herodias, danced before Herod the Tetrarch who was so pleased that he promised the girl anything she wished. Following her mother's instructions, she demanded the head of Saint John the Baptist to be brought to her on a plate.

De Feure has depicted the scene in a small courtyard which gives on to an idyllic garden, partly obscured by the large flowers and luxuriant vegetation in the foreground to the left. On the right,

barely visible on a large stone throne, a robed figure sits gazing upon the young girl. With her long hair hanging before her eyes, she seems to be in a trance as she dances, drugged perhaps by the stream of heavy incense that trails and twists upwards and around her.

Although Salome as the archetypal femme fatale was highly favoured among the Symbolists, with notable versions by Gustave Moreau and Lucien Lévy-Dhurmer, de Feure rarely treated the subject and its inclusion, if it is indeed Salome, in a series of works largely devoted to Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal* remains a conundrum.



32

Imaginez Diane
(Imagine Diana)

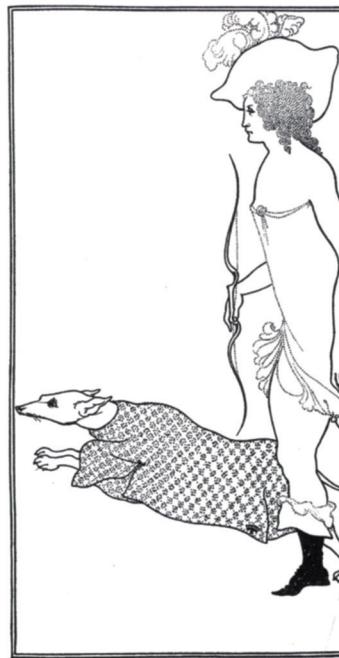
1897-1898

gouache on paper, 34 x 25 cm

signed bottom left: G De Feure
Collection Jean-Edouard Gautrot, Paris

Imaginez Diane is one of the works executed for Baron Vitta which draws on a poem from *Les Fleurs du mal* other than *Les Femmes damnées*. Its title is from the opening stanza of *Sisina*, in which Baudelaire describes the breathless excitement of the goddess Diana leading the hunt:

*Imagine Diana as galant mistress of the hounds,
Dashing through forest or darting through thickets,
Hair and breasts to the wind, drunk on the noise.
Superb and challenging the best horsemen.*



■ Fig. 44 Aubrey Beardsley
Atalanta

2nd version 1897

ink drawing

British Museum, London

33

Femme damnée

(Woman Damned)

1897-1898

gouache on paper, 34,5 x 25 cm

signed bottom left: de Feure

Collection Victor Arwas, London

In a graveyard, a naked woman rises from a mass of swirling vegetation, her arms upstretched as if in parody of Christ crucified. With an overflowing chalice in one hand and her writhing serpent-like hair in the other, she is held triumphantly aloft by a bestial demon or satyr. This perfidious unveiling of woman as a prized trophy when in fact she is an instrument of the Devil whose very purpose is to lead man to his perdition may, despite the totally different handling, be compared with Otto Greiner's *The Devil showing Woman to the People* of 1897.

It is difficult to attribute with any degree of certainty a specific literary source to this work.

Belonging as it does to the Baron Vitta series, it may have its origins in *Les Femmes damnées*, inspired by the imagery of the opening lines of the sixth stanza and their almost overwhelming declamatory tone:

*'O virgins, O demons, O monsters,
O martyrs,
Great spirits scornful of reality,
Seekers of the infinite, devotees and
satyrs...'*

With its muted colouring acting as a counterbalance to the exuberance of line, *Femme damnée* reveals de Feure at the height of his creative powers and at his most eloquent.



■ Fig. 45 Otto Greiner
*The Devil showing Woman to the
People* (detail)
1897
lithograph, 53 x 45 cm
private collection



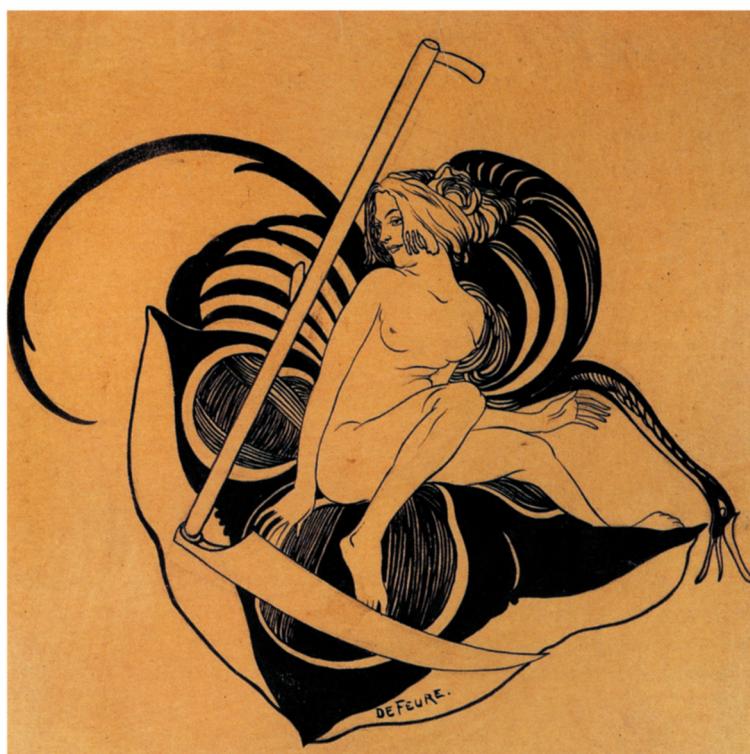
34
L'Esprit du mal
 (The Spirit of Evil)
 1897-1898
gouache on paper, 46.5 x 33 cm
signed bottom centre: De Feure
Collection Victor Arwas, London

Although *L'Esprit du mal* is contemporary with the works commissioned by Baron Vitta and is evidently very similar stylistically, it is not actually part of the series and is considerably larger in format.

Once again, de Feure returns to the theme of sapphic love but, whereas in other works the true nature of the women's relationship is merely hinted at, here the subject becomes more explicit. Two naked women are portrayed on a steeply sloping bank, one clapping her hands over her ears in an attempt to silence the other's implorings. Eavesdropping upon this scene is an extraordinary creature, green of skin and hair, half-hidden in a cave beneath the grassy bank. Although human in form, from the waist down its body tapers into a long tail decorated with striations which are

continued over much of the surface of the work.

The cave or grotto as symbol of the opening to subconscious and suppressed sexual desires takes on a particularly malefic dimension, as with the female devil in *L'Abîme* (cat. 9), by the presence of the wizened crone or genie lurking in its entrance.



35
La Femme et la Mort
 (Woman and Death)
 1897-1898
Indian ink on paper, 16 x 16 cm
signed bottom centre: De Feure
private collection

Stylistically, *La Femme et la Mort* belongs to the same grouping as the illustrations for *La Porte des rêves* (cat. 81), in particular the tail-pieces, and may have originally been intended for inclusion in the book.

The association between woman and death was a major Decadent-Symbolist obsession and although the theme's origins were both wide and complex, they can ultimately be traced to Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal*. *La Femme et la Mort* is, in fact, contemporary with a series of drawings by the Belgian artist Armand Rassenfosse illustrating the volume. The position of the woman with Death's scythe in the present work appears to be based on a synthesis of two of them: *L'Horloge* and *Le Jeu*.

■ Fig. 46 Armand Rassenfosse
Le Jeu
 1898
sanguine and ink on paper, diam.
14.5 cm
Collection Léo Dohmen, Antwerp



36

La Gourmandise

(Gluttony)

c. 1898

watercolour on paper, 42 x 53.5 cm

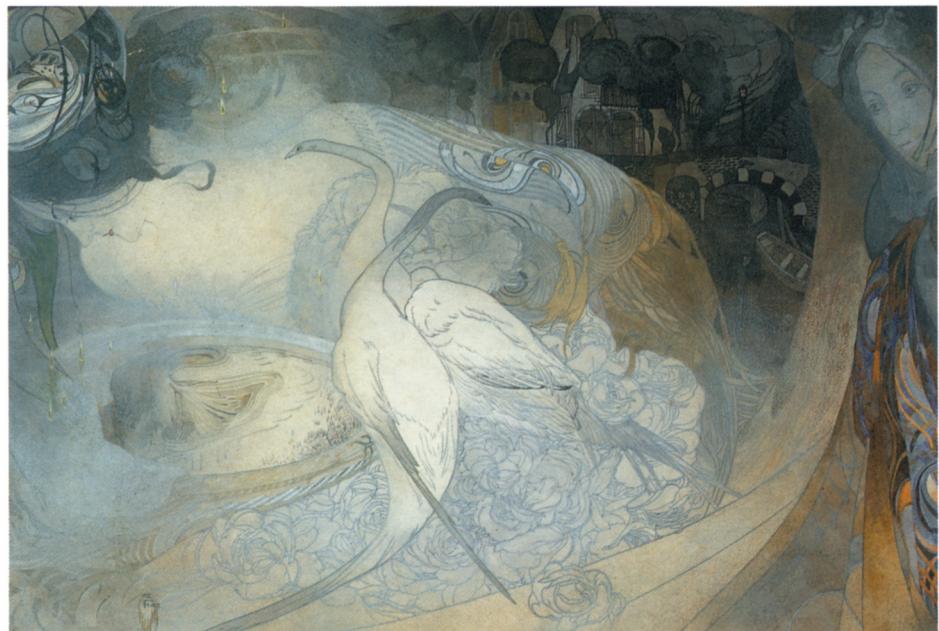
signed bottom right: de Feure

private collection

In February 1900, in an article in *Le Figaro illustré*, Henri Frantz noted that de Feure had depicted *Les Sept Péchés capitaux* - The Seven Deadly Sins - as women in a series of watercolours that the author found remarkable for their delicate shades of colour and intricate decoration. However, when Octave Uzanne had published his own article on de Feure in *The Studio* in November 1897, he related how the artist was busily working on the illustrations to Marcel Schwob's *La Porte des rêves* (cat. 81) as well as his series of paintings to be published as *Les Féminiflores* (cat. 26), but made no mention of *Les Sept Péchés capitaux*. Being a close friend and collaborator, it seems improbable that Uzanne would have been unaware of such an important project or would have omitted any reference to it, which suggests that de Feure had not yet started the series.

This particular work was one of two that belonged to Siegfried Bing who auctioned them along with the rest of his collection of modern paintings in order to subsidise his investment in the Art Nouveau Bing pavilion at the Exposition universelle in Paris. The sale took place at the Hôtel Drouot on 17th May 1900 and *La Gourmandise* made 110 Francs.

Frantz's description of Gluttony underlines its narcissistic subject matter, the sense of indifference and insensibility to the outside world which is typical of the current of egocentricity found in much Symbolist literature and painting: 'In a garden such as the painter loves, there is a young woman; among the gold and precious stones before her are piled the rarest dishes and fruits. In vain, a musician tries to soften her soul, in vain men cut each other's throat for her.'



37

L'Orgueil

(Pride)

c. 1898

watercolour on paper, 34 x 51.5 cm

signed bottom left: de Feure

private collection, Switzerland

In this composition from *Les Sept Péchés capitaux*, Pride is symbolised by a woman gazing at her own reflection. She is portrayed in a small boat bedecked with flowers, leaning forward to see herself in a basin of water while two birds with long sinuous necks and trailing plumage perch on the rim. Like the musician in *La Gourmandise* (cat.

36), a woman on the quay seems

unable to capture her attention.

Pride is depicted literally as a female Narcissus with a peacock feather in her hair, totally absorbed in herself, continuing to stare at her own image long after dusk even when there is hardly enough light to see. As with the previous work, the various forms of self indulgence and gratification and the ultimate rejection of exterior reality are symbolised by a woman who, to borrow Frantz's words, 'remains silent, cold and unfeeling, heedful only of her own pleasure and pursuing her dream.'



38

La Dame au chapeau noir
(The Lady with a Black Hat)
1898-1900
oil on canvas, 59.5 x 72.5 cm
signed vertically bottom right:
de Feure
private collection

This version in oil of *Affiches et estampes Pierrefort* (cat. 64) is ostensibly a copy, yet it presents a number of notable differences which suggest that it was executed after the poster. Firstly, the composition is in the same direction as the poster, contrary to that of the poster *Salon des Cent* (cat. 61) where it is has been reversed as a result of the lithographic process. Secondly, the print that the woman is holding up for the spectator to admire, which is the very essence of the poster's advertising message, has been

replaced by a bouquet of flowers. Thirdly and finally, two elements in the execution of the work, the impasto passages in the cloud formation and the exaggerated facial expression, would also suggest a somewhat later date. Generally, during the Symbolist and Art Nouveau period, de Feure sought a perfect finish to his works, which was admired by the critics. There were, however, some exceptions: *L'Etude de nu* (Collection S. Joel Schur) a study of the artist's first wife dating from the period 1897-

1900 includes similar handling, as does the landscape *La Mer du nord* (private collection) which was presented in the de Feure retrospective at L'Art Nouveau Bing in March 1903. The work *La Dame au chapeau noir* probably dates from the late 1890's but certainly before 1905 given the style of the floral motif.

39

Expérience ou Vice

(Experience or Vice)

1899

gouache on paper, 32.5 x 50 cm

signed bottom right: de Feure

Collection George Encil, Freeport,

Bahamas

When *Le Figaro illustré* devoted a special issue to 'La Femme par de Feure' in February 1900, among the colour inset plates was a series of four women's heads surrounded by flowers. For the first time since their publication in that magazine, they are reunited in the present exhibition. This work and following one have been understood to represent *Expérience ou Vice* and *Innocence ou Vertu* based on contrasting images of town and country, facial expression and gesture, flower symbolism etc., but the four gouaches undoubtedly constitute a unified group. The fact that three of them have a canal scene in the background suggests that the town may be Bruges. This was not only the city in which de Feure stayed during the mid 1890's and the subject of his lithographic suite *Bruges mystique et sensuelle* (cat. 75), but also the setting of Rodenbach's novel *Bruges la Morte* which had inspired several works by de Feure (cat. 21).

The canal-side brawl in *Expérience ou Vice* parallels the havoc and disaster that Jane Scott brought to Hugues Viane in Rodenbach's novel. As in his earlier Symbolist paintings, the background functions as a projection of the woman's thoughts or misdeeds, but whereas in previous treatments her inner perversity and malefic nature were expressed by a sharp, jutting profile, here they are disguised by the mask of her superficial beauty.



40

Innocence ou Vertu

(Innocence or Virtue)

1899

gouache on paper, 33 x 49.5 cm

signed bottom left: de Feure

Collection George Encil, Freeport,

Bahamas

In contrast to the aura of self-assurance surrounding the woman scheming or musing on her projects in the previous work, here an atmosphere of bemused naivety pervades the image. Both compositions can be seen as progressions from the two classic formulations of the femme fatale. In

the same way that *Expérience ou Vice* may be interpreted as an evolution from the deliberate wrongdoer, causing harm for her own perverse amusement, this wide-eyed woman with her child-like gaze and fingers touching the chin and lower lip recalls the innocent creature who, despite her best intentions, unwittingly wreaks havoc and disaster.



Contemplation
(Contemplation)
1899

gouache on paper, 32 x 49 cm
signed bottom right: de Feure
private collection

Whereas the background scene in *Expérience ou Vice* (cat. 39) depicts the drama of a crime, in *Contemplation* it is the view of a man and a woman strolling romantically at night. While the moonlight is reflected by the ripples of the water, they are almost invisible, cloaked in the shadow of the trees.

Framed by flowers on long tendril-like stems arching on either side of her head, the woman who imagines this scene is sumptuously dressed, with a high, Elizabethan-style ruff and finely wrought Art Nouveau jewelry adorning her shoulders and hair.



42

Femme en profil
(Woman in profile)
1899

gouache on paper, 32 x 49 cm
signed bottom right: de Feure
private collection

By the interplay between the woman in profile and the background rider, the present work is reminiscent of *Mélancolie - La Voix du mal* (cat. 16). Like a beautiful and majestic princess, a young woman regards a delicately held flower as a caped horseman, his head bowed in dejection, crosses a bridge in old Bruges with his manservant. The

buildings are drawn in a simple, almost naive manner and their quaint architecture lends a strange, wistful quality to the scene.

As if in contrast, the woman's bonnet and high collar are magnificently and elaborately decorated in deep turquoise and gold. The intricately chased jewels in the form of insects and naked human figures lend a touch of Decadent sensuality.

It is with such works as these that de Feure attains an apogee of Art Nouveau splendour, where each detail - hair, jewelry, leaves or petals - provides the excuse for a visual feast.



43

Le Coup de vent, Hollande

(The Gust of Wind, Holland)
1900-1903

gouache on paper, 37.5 x 50.5 cm
signed bottom right: G de Feure
Collection Alain Lesieur, Paris

Le Coup de vent, Hollande, belongs to a period of transition in de Feure's art where the emphasis shifts in the artist's representation of woman from a detailed exploration of the feminine mystique to a purely decorative evocation of the female form. With its elegant *Parisienne* striding across a bridge near the Dutch coast on a blustery day, her fine clothes caught by a sudden gust of wind, the work may be interpreted as an allusion to the artist's French and Dutch origins and loyalties. It belongs to a series executed around the turn of the century where, according to René Puaux, 'he has applied the

marvellous technique of the Japanese to European landscape, and has created a new style'. The influence of Japan is apparent not only in the execution but also in the choice of title, while the figure on the right, her clothes billowing in the wind, is reminiscent of that in Hiroshige's woodcut *The River Mie at Yokkaichi* from the series *Fifty-three Stations of the Tokaido*.

■ *Fig. 47 Ando Hiroshige*
The River Mie at Yokkaichi from
The Fifty-three Stations of the
Tokaido
colour woodcut



44

Elégantes sur la plage

(Elegant Ladies on the Beach)
1900-1902

watercolour and gouache on paper,
55 x 41 cm
signed bottom left: de Feure
Collection Jane Abdy, London

Although sapphic love was a pre-eminently Decadent theme and highly favoured during the Symbolist period, de Feure's fascination with the subject remained constant throughout his career and his many stylistic changes. It finds expression in this Japanese-inspired series both in the present work and *Les Chercheuses d'infini* (cat. 45).

Two women are walking their dogs on a beach. As one woman clasps the other in her arms, two large crabs advance from either side, frightening the dogs. De Feure has introduced a certain amount of

humour in the way he has depicted the dogs, while the movement of the crabs readily invites comparison with the manner in which the woman's hands close around her companion. Although the tonality of the work is subdued, being delicately executed in large abstract washes of brown and beige, the women's finery is both extravagant and meticulously detailed.



45

Les Chercheuses d'infini
(The Seekers of Infinity)

1900-1902

watercolour and gouache on paper,
50 x 36 cm

signed bottom right: de Feure
Collection Alain Lesieur, Paris

The work takes its title from Baudelaire's poem *Les Femmes damnées*, but de Feure has not directly illustrated the poet's verses. In contrast to earlier renditions where he followed the imagery of the opening lines and depicted the limitless ocean and its far horizon as a symbol of the search for the absolute, here the artist has situated the sapphic lovers high in the mountains, seated perilously on the brink of a precipice as one holds her companion's hand and whispers endearments to her. The perspective rises sharply from the chasm before them to an abandoned windmill

high above them, a motif which de Feure also associated with the theme of sapphic love in *Elégantes sur la plage* (cat. 44). The precariousness of the women's situation, perched on the edge of a vertiginous abyss and the impracticality of their extremely long gowns reflect Baudelaire's opinion in the poem that their quest is ultimately futile and doomed to failure.



46

Femme sur une montagne
(Woman on a Mountain)

1900-1902

watercolour and gouache on paper,
54 x 42 cm

signed bottom left: de Feure
private collection

Femme sur une montagne, of all the works belonging to this small series, demonstrates best de Feure's assimilation of the principles of the Japanese approach to landscape painting and his mastery of them. In general, these Japanese-inspired compositions are extremely sober, in sharp contrast with the floral exuberance of such works as *Contemplation* (cat. 41) or *Femme en profil* (cat. 42). Here, de Feure's deft and sparing use of pearl-grey with the merest touch of pale blue and white serves to create an Occidental equivalent of a Japanese *kakemono*. Such a meeting of East and West in

his art did not find favour with everybody. At the time of the de Feure retrospective at L'Art Nouveau Bing in March 1903, René Puaux had specifically the works belonging to this series in mind when he wrote: 'The only reproach that can be made of the artist is his insistence on combining in the same painting methods and visions which seem discordant. The woman in sumptuous clothes who wanders in a wild Flemish or Japanese landscape gives us an often strange and sometimes disagreeable sensation.' However, by the next month when the article appeared in the American magazine *Brush and Pencil*, the author had apparently revised his opinion for the criticism had disappeared.



47
Promeneuses
 (Strollers)
 1900-1903
 gouache on paper, 57.5 x 45.5 cm
 signed bottom left: de Feure
 Collection of the late M. Manoukian,
 Paris

Among the late nineteenth-century chroniclers of Parisian street life were the socially concerned Steinlen and the Nabis, Vallotton and Bonnard. Although de Feure had been loosely associated with these artists, the former by his frequentation of the Chat Noir and the latter two through his participation in Le Barc de

Boutteville's Expositions des Peintres impressionnistes et symbolistes, he did not share their thematic preoccupations and, apart from the race courses at Longchamp and Chantilly, was never really motivated by scenes of contemporary life.

Promeneuses, however, both by its subject and the influence of Japanese art, invites comparison with a number of works by the Nabis, such as Vallotton's *Une Rue (Coin de rue)* of 1895 (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York), or, for example, the right-hand panels of Bonnard's lithographic screen *La Promenade des nourrices, frise de fiacres* of 1899. As

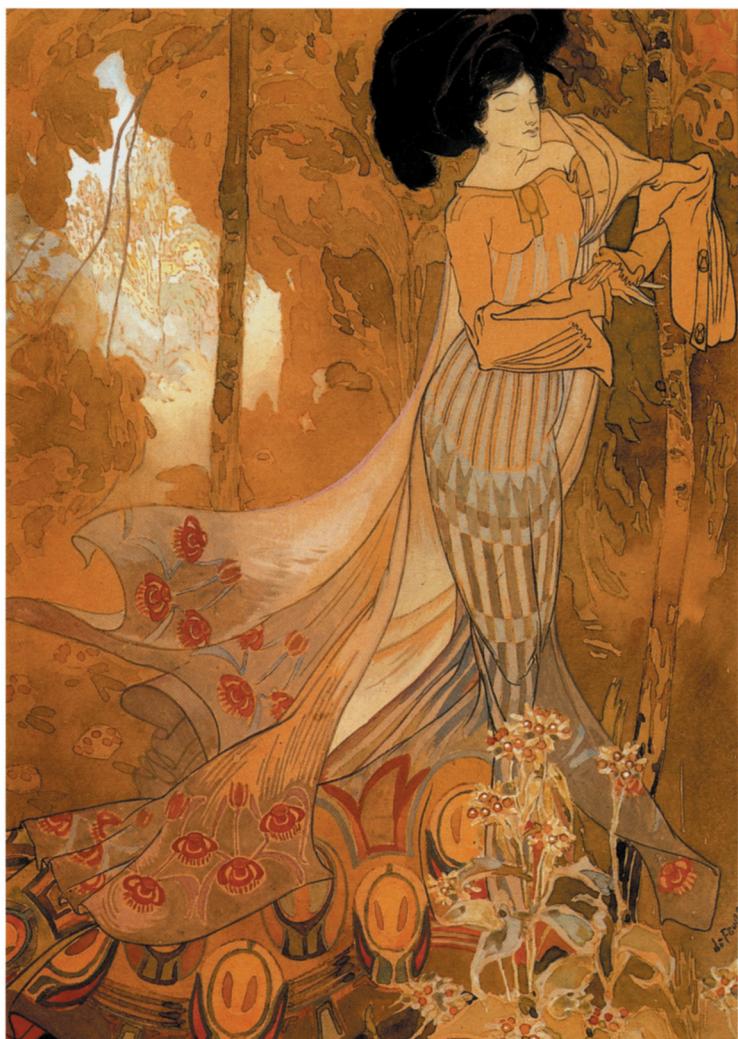
with his poster, *Affiches et estampes Pierrefort* (cat. 64), de Feure's Japonism is evident in the highly foreshortened perspective and the dramatic cutting of the image on three sides, but rather than the large expanse of flat colour perfectly suited to lithographic work, here de Feure has allowed himself, like an Occidental Utamaro, to present a wide variety of patterns and decorative motifs.

■ Fig. 48 Félix Vallotton
Une rue (Coin de rue) 1895
 gouache on cardboard,
 35.9 x 29.9 cm
 The Metropolitan Museum of Art,
 The Robert Lehman Collection,
 New York



■ Fig. 49 Kitagawa Utamaro
 From New Patterns after Utamaro's
 Style
 1797-1798
 colour woodcut





48

Fleur d'automne
(Autumn Flower)
1900-1903
gouache on paper, 28.5 x 20 cm
signed bottom right: de Feure
Collection Raymond Toupenet, Paris

Fleur d'automne was reproduced in colour by René Puaux in his *Oeuvres de Georges de Feure* at the time of the retrospective at L'Art Nouveau Bing in March 1903, but was not listed in the exhibition catalogue. It is typical of those gouaches produced by the artist after 1900 where his women, now devoid of all sinister connotation, stroll in their gracefully flowing Art Nouveau gowns in timeless woodland glades. It was works such as this that allowed Puaux to write, not without some distortion of the truth, in the American magazine *Brush and Pencil*: 'Over the amphora of the feminine form he has draped all the precious fabrics which, little by little, his fancy has evolved. But always it has been the pure, decorative beauty, never the sensual, degenerate side, which he has lovingly treated.'

49

Femme dans un paysage
(Woman in a Landscape)
1901-1905
gouache on paper in the shape of a fan, 30 x 56 cm
signed bottom right: de Feure
Collection Raymond Toupenet, Paris

Late 19th-century interest in fan-shaped works was revitalised by the currents of Japonism and Impressionism and throughout the first fifteen years or so of his career, from the early Pre-Symbolist works to the Art Nouveau period, de Feure was similarly attracted to the form. The appeal of the format was three-fold: not only did it offer the possibility of experimentation and innovation, it also helped blur the distinctions between fine and applied art. Furthermore, its specifically feminine nature meant that it was ideally suited to a female audience and de Feure frequently exploited this potential, offering as gifts original fan designs to the wives of collectors and critics who championed his art such as Albert Sarraut and Achille Astre.

Whereas the main difference between the Impressionists and their predecessors was the introduction of narrative subject matter, the development in de Feure's use of the genre is in the opposite direction, moving from the anecdotal or literary to the purely decorative. With the decline of Art Nouveau, de Feure abandoned the format completely.





50

La Source dans la forêt
(Woodland Spring)

1898-1903

gouache on paper, 42 x 23 cm

signed bottom left: de Feure

Collection George Encil, Freeport,
Bahamas

The large retrospective exhibition at L'Art Nouveau Bing in 1903 allowed the public to discover de Feure as a landscape painter, with more than fifty such works being presented. Among these was a series of watercolours and gouaches, small and vertical in format, representing woodland scenes, more often than not with a spring or stream in the foreground. They are also executed in a similar manner: starting with a rapid and free watercolour or gouache wash, tree-trunks, leaves or ripples on the water have been added through judicious touches of the brush.

René Puaux, writing at the time of the exhibition, described de Feure's working method: 'Whatman and Bristol become the palette of the artist, and on them he mixes, dilutes, shades off, and works his colours, here leaving a spot clear white, there laying on thickly with gouache'.

51

La Source
(The Spring)

1898-1903

gouache on paper, 65 x 23 cm

signed bottom right: G de Feure
private collection

La Source, with its extremely narrow, vertical format perhaps expresses best the influence of Japan on de Feure's landscapes. The perspective is highly compressed, and each element is ordered one behind the other; the eye mounting from the spring in the lower foreground to the tree in flower to the cypress and finally the tiny glimpse of sky at the very top. Here and there, de Feure allows himself some audacious use of colour, with a deep vibrant blue in the cypress and a touch of lemon yellow in the sky on the left.

52

Sous-bois
(Woodland scene)

1898-1903

gouache on paper, 27 x 23.5 cm

signed bottom right: de Feure
Rijksprentenkabinet, Amsterdam

This small but charming gouache is one of the few original works by de Feure in a public collection and a fine example of his highly personal approach to landscape painting at the turn of the century. In contrast to the bold spontaneity of the initial wash which gives form to the valley, de Feure has meticulously detailed the foliage of the trees. This procedure of building on abstract forms may be compared with that of Odilon Redon in certain of his works, such as *Grand Panneau jaune* (Musée d'Orsay, Paris).



■ Fig. 50 Odilon Redon
Grand Panneau jaune
oil on canvas, 249 x 173 cm
Musée d'Orsay, Paris





53
Château dans la forêt
(Castle in the Forest)
1897-1905
gouache on paper, 30 x 45 cm
signed bottom left: de Feure
private collection

The vague and mysterious castle seen in the distance, silhouetted behind branches and creepers, may have been inspired by *Le Palais du silence*, a Symbolist play that de Feure wrote during the 1890's and later transformed into a ballet for his friend Claude Debussy. Indeed, *Château dans la forêt* is structured like a stage set, reduced to a small number of planes with the principal one formed by the imposing black trees which frame the composition. The work dates from the turn of the century period and while the indistinct form of the castle generates a definite Symbolist atmosphere, the parallel striations of

the bark and the rosette-like knot-holes are distinctive Art Nouveau elements which are reminiscent respectively of Toorop and the Glasgow School.



54

Le Jardin de l'artiste à Bois-le-Roi
(The Artist's Garden at Bois-le-Roi)
1900-1902
gouache on paper, 28.5 x 33 cm
signed bottom centre: G de Feure
private collection

This small gouache was one of the six landscapes reproduced in René Puaux's *Oeuvres de Georges de Feure*, a booklet published at the time of the major retrospective of the artist's paintings and decorative art at l'Art Nouveau Bing in March 1903. It was included in the exhibition under the title *Vieille Masure à Bois-le-Roi*.

It is an intriguing work, which may almost be described as a psychological portrait of the artist's country home. In the foreground on the left, some branches are bowed down by the weight of ripe fruit, while to the right the sunlight plays on a tree-trunk and a patch of flowers. In the background, hidden in the shade and somewhat



■ Fig. 51 Piet Mondriaan
Huisje in Abcoude
1898-1900
watercolour and gouache on paper,
45.5 x 58.5 cm
Haags Gemeentemuseum, The Hague

foreboding, is the old cottage in which the artist has made his retreat. There is a strong contrast between this evocation of the bounty of Nature and the sombre and secretive dwelling shrouded in mystery. Such an atmosphere is also to be found in Piet Mondriaan's landscapes of this period, for example, *Huisje in Abcoude* (Haags Gemeentemuseum, The Hague).

55

Le Faisan: projet de papier peint

(The Pheasant: project for
wallpaper)

1900-1905

gouache on paper, 54 x 80.5 cm

monogrammed bottom right

Collection Gérard Lévy, Paris

In contrast to his Art Nouveau furniture which harks back to the Louis XVI period, in his projects for fabric and wallpaper, de Feure was above all influenced by Japanese art. In both, de Feure is ultimately indebted to Bing: the former through putting into practice his patron's philosophy that his designers should thoroughly immerse themselves in the old French tradition, and the latter through *Le Japon artistique*, which had introduced a wide variety of material to Western artists.



56

Fleurs stylisées

(Stylised Flowers)

c. 1901

gouache on paper, 53 x 51.5 cm

signed bottom centre: De Feure
Collection Jane Abdy, London

The extent to which de Feure's fabric and wallpaper designs are inspired by Japanese art varies from work to work, as does the degree of abstraction. Both here and in *Le Faisan* (cat. 55), de Feure has played with complementaries, creating fashionable combinations of mauve, lilac and pale blue with shades of yellow and ochre.





57
Le Diablotin
 (The Little Devil)
 1892
 colour lithograph, 79.5 x 60 cm
 signed bottom left: *De Feure*
Imprimerie J. Weiner, Paris
 private collection

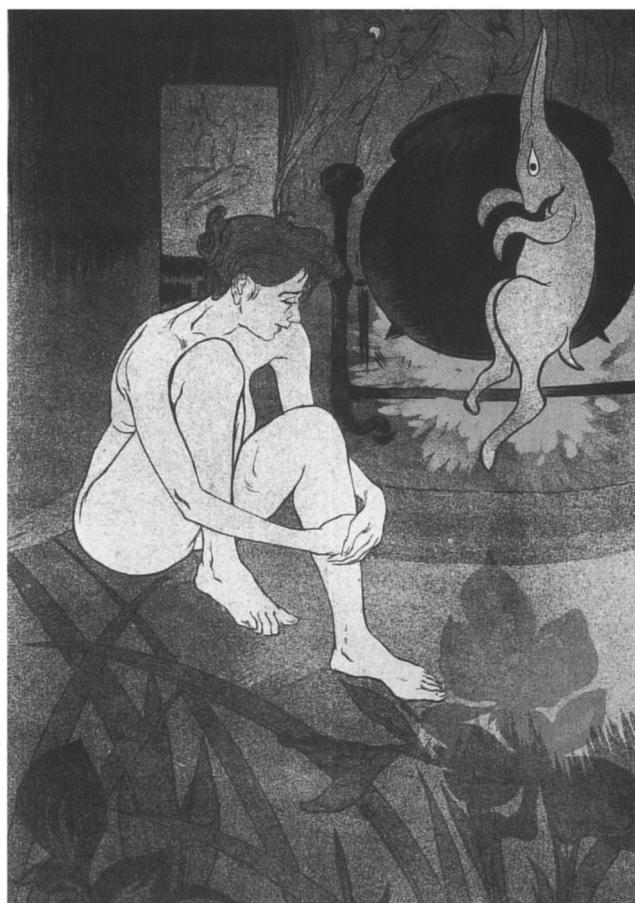
Le Diablotin is the earliest known poster by de Feure. Uzanne, writing in 1898, described it as being the artist's very first poster, while the poster dealer Sagot, in his sale catalogue of November 1894, placed it among his first.

Le Diablotin was a Brussels-based journal of which eighteen issues were published between 28th August and 25th December 1892, thus allowing an accurate date to be proposed. In addition to this poster, de Feure also designed the cover heading for the last issue.

Le Diablotin attests to de Feure's early involvement with the Belgian artistic and literary milieu and particularly his long friendship with Charles Vos, who was the newspaper's secretary. In January 1893, the publication changed its

name to *Le Diable au corps*, for which de Feure also executed a poster and an illustration to Paul Delmet's *Le Petit Navire*, dedicated by de Feure 'A mon ami Vos'. In April 1898, de Feure's lithographic album *Les Fleurs du mal* was on sale in the offices of Vos' *Le Journal des ventes*, and, by July of the same year, he had designed for the newspaper one of his finest posters. Many years later, in 1912, Vos presented an exhibition of de Feure's paintings in his gallery on the rue Coudenberg in Brussels.

Technically, *Le Diablotin* is a virtuoso performance, amply demonstrating de Feure's early and total mastery of the art of lithography and its potential in the field of poster design.



58
Aux copains du diable au corps
 (To Friends who have the Devil in Them)
 1893
 colour lithograph, 54 x 36 cm
 signed bottom right: *De Feure*
Imprimerie G. Bataille, Paris
 Collection Victor Arwas, London

The Diable au Corps was a café-cabaret in Brussels which, like its famous counterpart in Paris, *Le Chat Noir*, published its own newspaper. This small *affichette* was given away with the 24th December 1893 issue as a Christmas gift to regular customers and readers.

Aux copains du diable au corps is an elaborate visual pun in French based on iconographical and colour symbolism. The poster portrays a naked woman warming herself before a large hearth. On the right, a bearded creature regards her with a leer, his lustful eyes almost popping out of his head, while the unfortunate rabbit he is holding up by the ears is about to be dropped into the boiling cauldron. From it, he will emerge a *chaud lapin* (hot

rabbit), namely, someone whose sexual appetite is enormous. The naked woman's body and the rabbit are neutral zones between the warm-cold contrast of the red-orange and the pale blue, the rabbit's fate swinging the balance. Similarly, *avoir le diable au corps* (to have the Devil in you) expresses that mood in which a person derives great and perverse pleasure from committing any sort of mischief or misdeed. Thus, the 'chaud lapin' is temperamentally related to the 'diabol au corps' and is naturally its *copain* or friend. In this way, de Feure provided an amusing visual joke for the regulars, celebrating their reputation for pranks while flattering their sexual prowess.



59

Léo Bert

(Léo Bert)

1893-1894

lithograph in black, 183 x 64.5 cm

monogrammed bottom left

Imprimerie G. Bataille, Paris

Musée de la Publicité, Paris

Created during a period when the illustrated poster in colour had captured the imagination of artists and public alike, de Feure's deliberate use of black and white for *Léo Bert* is all the more striking.

The actor, seen from the back, raises his right hand in a dramatic gesture to the crowd beyond. High on the left, one can distinguish the shadowy form of the Tour Saint Jacques in central Paris. The rest of the background is the blank, untreated paper on which the design

has been printed and against which the performer is silhouetted. The upward sweeping movement of his body leads the eye from his left foot to the outstretched hand presenting the name banner across the top of the poster.

Léo Bert is arguably the most successful of de Feure's designs for the café-concert, clearly demonstrating that the very essence of a good poster is a simple yet powerful image.



60

Camille Roman

(Camille Roman)

1893-1894

colour lithograph, 131 x 94 cm

signed bottom right: De Feure

Imprimerie G. Bataille, Paris

Musée de la Publicité, Paris

In total, de Feure designed thirty-one posters - the same number as Toulouse-Lautrec - of which a dozen were destined for stars of the café-concert. With the exception of the American dancer Loïe Fuller, these performers are all but forgotten today. The composition of *Camille Roman*, like the majority of his café-concert posters, betrays the influence of Jules Chéret particularly in the arrangement of colours, with green and blue concentrated in the upper half and yellow and red in the lower.



61
Salon des Cent
 (Salon of the One Hundred)
 1894
 colour lithograph, 60 x 39.5 cm
 monogrammed and signed bottom left:
De Feure
Imprimerie Bourgerie, Paris
Collection Victor Arwas, London

The modernity and worldliness of de Feure's poster for the fifth Salon des Cent in October 1894 contrasts strongly with that by Grasset for the second exhibition some six months earlier. The Grasset maiden, dressed in a simple smock, rather innocently and wistfully contemplated a flowering stem of cow-parsley. With a well sharpened pencil and sketch-board in her hand, she was a classic and timeless evocation of Art and Inspiration. De Feure's elegant and contemporarily dressed woman also contemplates a flower, but it is a rose, representing sophistication and artifice rather than the simplicity and humbleness of cow-parsley. The very gesture of her fingers and look in her eyes show that this is not a woman who passively waits for inspiration but one who decides and acts. However, this representation gives no inkling of the evil nature of

woman so clearly portrayed in the original project, *La Botaniste* (cat. 12). Thus, the poster marks the point of separation in de Feure's art between the femme fatale characteristic of his Symbolist oils, gouaches and prints of the mid 1890's and the beautiful and cultivated creatures that grace his artistic posters.

■ Fig. 52 Eugène Grasset
Salon des Cent. Exposition Grasset
 1894
 colour lithograph, 64 x 50.2 cm
Musée de la Publicité, Paris

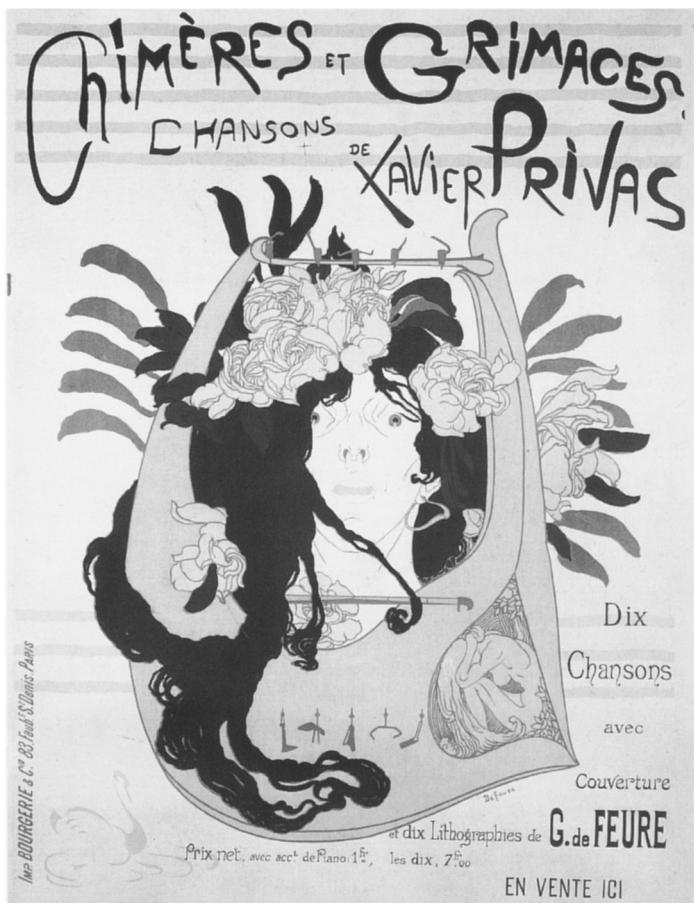


62
A Jeanne d'Arc
 (To Joan of Arc)
 1896
 colour lithograph, 243 x 92 cm
 signed bottom right: *de Feure 96*
Imprimerie Bourgerie, Paris
private collection

A Jeanne d'Arc was de Feure's largest poster, yet strangely enough the only one to be explicitly designed as a *décoration artistique*. In his choice of high vertical format and an imposing single female figure, the name of Mucha obviously springs to mind. Mucha had designed his first poster for Sarah Bernhardt at Christmas 1894, and had in turn been somewhat influenced by Carlos Schwabe's 1892 poster for the first *Salon de la Rose+Croix*. Mucha's next posters for Bernhardt, *La Dame aux camélias* and *Lorenzaccio* did not appear until late 1896, for performances which opened on 30th September and 3rd December respectively. It is possible, therefore, that *A Jeanne d'Arc* actually predates these Mucha posters. Two versions of the poster exist. The first is very close to the oil painting (cat. 27) which carries the same text at the top but, in addition to the signature and date, is monogrammed either side of the saint's head and bears a device in the form of a swan, the same as *Chimères et grimaces* (cat. 63). The second version carries in the lower half of the poster an additional text, in highly stylised Art Nouveau characters which reads: 'Draperies Nouveautés Astre et Soux Carcassonne'.



■ Fig. 53 Alphonse Mucha
Gismonda
 1894
 colour lithograph, 210.8 x 68.2 cm
private collection



63

Chimères et grimaces

(*Chimeras and Grimaces*)

c. 1893

colour lithograph, 80 x 60 cm

signed bottom right: *De Feure*

Imprimerie Bourgerie, Paris

private collection

Two posters by de Feure attest to his involvement with the café-cabaret night life of Montmartre: *Les Montmartroises* and *Chimères et grimaces*. The former, for a collection of songs and poems by Jean Goudezki, dates from about 1893-1894 and is close to de Feure's Pre-Symbolist manner both in conception and style. *Chimères et grimaces*, on the other hand, combines Symbolist subject matter with the artist's burgeoning Art Nouveau style. The poster represents the head of Orpheus framed by a lyre, a favourite theme with Symbolists ranging from Odilon Redon to Alexandre Séon and Jean Delville. Like Delville, de Feure appears to have chosen a woman to portray the poet, whose rich brown hair, bedecked with abundant lilac

coloured flowers, flows around a canary-yellow lyre.

In addition to the artist's signature, *Chimères et grimaces*, like the poster *A Jeanne d'Arc* (cat. 62), bears a device in the form of a swan. Because of the lilting call it makes before it dies, the swan was associated by the Greeks with the Muses and the myths of Apollo and Orpheus; it later became a universal symbol of Death and the passage to eternal life.

■ Fig. 54 Jean Delville

Orphée

1893

oil on canvas, 79 x 99 cm

Collection Anne-Marie Gillion-Crowet, Brussels



64

Affiches et estampes Pierrefort

(*Posters and Prints Pierrefort*)

1897-1898

colour lithograph, 64 x 83 cm

monogrammed bottom right and signed bottom left: *G de Feure*

Imprimerie Chaix, Paris

Collection Michel Romand, Paris

hands appear to have been inspired by, if not directly borrowed from, Utagawa Kuniyoshi's print of the poetess *Ono no Komachi* from the series *Kenyū fujo kagami*. As a final touch, de Feure carries his emulation of the East to the point of monogramming the poster in addition to signing it, employing a similar brick red ink to that often used for the seals on Japanese prints. As with a number of other posters, such as *Le Salon des Cent* (cat. 61) and *A Jeanne d'Arc* (cat. 62), a painted version of *Affiches et estampes Pierrefort* exists, in which the print held by the woman has been replaced by a bouquet of flowers (cat. 38).

■ Fig. 55 Utagawa Kuniyoshi
Ono no Komachi from the series
Kenyū fujo kagami

c. 1843

colour woodcut, 35.5 x 23.4 cm

private collection





65
Lithographies originales album No. 1
 (Original Lithographs Album No. 1)
 c. 1898
 colour lithograph, 60 x 43.5 cm
 signed bottom right: *de Feure*
Imprimerie Duchatel, Paris
 Collection Victor Arwas, London

Although generally considered to be a poster, *Lithographies originales* was, in fact, designed as the cover for two print portfolios published by E. Duchatel, who was *essayeur* or trial proofer at Lemercier's and later Minot's. The first album contained four prints in addition to de Feure's cover, while there were five in the second by Maurice Eliot, Fantin Latour, Désiré Lucas, André Détouche and Dévambez.

The subject, namely an elegant woman contemplating a print, recalls Toulouse-Lautrec's cover for the first year of *L'Estampe originale* in 1893. In contrast to the misogynistic image of the femme fatale found in much of de Feure's Symbolist art, his artistic posters present a more favourable view of the turn of the century woman as an

emancipated and cultivated individual. Here, the intellectual and aesthetic acuity visible in the penetrating gaze on her face is reflected in the crisp elegance of her attire and the perfectly adjusted bow at her throat.

■ Fig. 56
Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec
La Lithographie
 1893
 colour lithograph, 56.5 x 63.8 cm
 private collection



66
Le Journal des ventes
 (The Auction Journal)
 1898
 colour lithograph, 64 x 49.5 cm
 signed lower left and lower right:
de Feure
Imprimerie Lemercier, Paris
 private collection

Created for a publication of his friend Charles Vos, *Le Journal des ventes* is one of the most opulent and evocative images of the Belle Epoque and deservedly de Feure's most celebrated poster. In a majestically orchestrated symphony of colours ranging from pale green, pink and beige to deep olive greens and rich browns, the artist depicts in profile his dashingly elegant admirer of an Art Nouveau vase.

The rectangles of the background trellis act as a foil to the sumptuous feathered hat and billowing sleeves of the woman's coat as well as the white tendrils which boldly snake across the image from the reserves for the text. On the lower reserve, de Feure has continued the outline of the main subject, while the small fox, *vos* in Dutch, visualises the publisher's name.



67

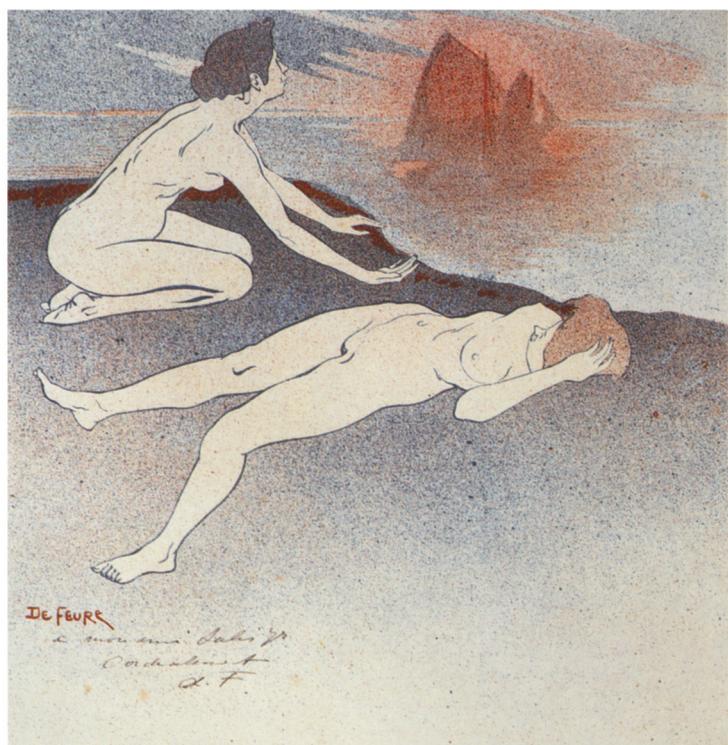
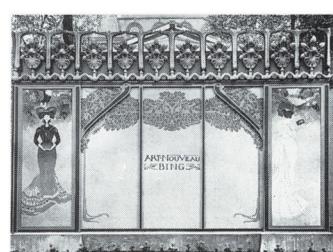
Thermes Liégeois Casino
(Casino of the Liège Thermal Baths)
1898-1899
colour lithograph, 81 x 61.5 cm
signed bottom left: de Feure
Imprimerie Bourgerie, Paris
Musée de la Publicité, Paris

The Palais des Thermes Liégeois, situated in a superb park with a magnificent view over the Meuse river, was inaugurated with a grand firework display on Saturday, 29th June 1895. Dating from the last years of the 19th century, *Thermes Liégeois Casino* marks not only the final phase in the evolution of de Feure's posters but also the introduction of an emblematic and purely decorative representation of woman in his art in general. This development reflects both the declining fortunes of Symbolism and the artist's burgeoning interest in Art Nouveau. Indeed, the poster bears a strong resemblance to *La Joaillerie*, one of the seven large oils painted by de Feure in late 1899 or early 1900 and which decorated the exterior of the Art Nouveau Bing pavilion at the Exposition universelle in Paris.

The woman is depicted approaching the casino, fanning herself, half turned to the spectator

who, naturally, assumes the role of her unseen companion. With a boa loosely flung over her shoulders, her elegant figure is placed far to the left, making room for a reserve on which a list of current events or attractions, or even a menu, could be displayed. As was often the case, this reserve may well have been a prerequisite of the commission, such a space allowing the maximum use and flexibility from a single design. De Feure attempts to attenuate the rather stark effect of this blank rectangle through the positioning of the word 'casino' and the exaggeratedly long train of the woman's gown which fans out behind her and across the reserve like the tail of a peacock.

■ Fig. 57 Georges de Feure
La Joaillerie
1899
oil on canvas, 280 x 103 cm
whereabouts unknown



68

Fleurs de la grève
(Beach Flowers)
1893-1894
colour lithograph, 29 x 21.5 cm
signed centre left: De Feure
Collection Victor Arwas, London

Dating from de Feure's first Symbolist phase, *Fleurs de la grève* illustrates the artist's practice of re-employing figures or floral motifs from one composition to another: here, the crouching nude on the left is borrowed from *La Course à l'abîme*, but has been reversed and reduced in size.

De Feure's thematic preoccupation with the ambiguous relationships between women and their confrontation on the primeval beach can be traced to Baudelaire's poem *Les Femmes damnées* from *Les Fleurs du mal*:

*'Like ruminating cattle stretched upon the sands,
They turn their eyes to the horizon of the sea...'*

This visual paraphrasing of Baudelaire throughout the 1890's and early 1900's was commented on by a variety of critics such as Henri Frantz, Gabriel Mourey and Octave Uzanne. Uzanne twice described - in



69
La Source du mal
 (The Spring of Evil)
 1894
 colour lithograph, 34.5 x 25 cm
 signed lower left: *de Feure*
 private collection

With this lithograph, which ranks among the finest achievements of Symbolist-Decadent art in any medium, de Feure has conjured an image of woman of archetypal intensity.

Like Narcissus contemplating his own reflection, the woman gazes into the stream, but rather than being mesmerised by her own beauty, she discovers that she is nothing but a creature driven by animal instinct, devoid of soul and intellectual aspiration - the Source of Evil. Her innate and disastrous ability to transform all things appears to be symbolised by a number of contrasts between hot and cold, fire and water, in which her hair streams upward like a blood red flame only to crystallise suddenly like ice.

The misogyny of Decadent

and Symbolist circles can be traced back to Baudelaire, who frequently made such comments as: 'Woman cannot separate the soul from the body. She is as simplistic as animals are - a satirist would say that is because she is nothing but a body.' Or again: 'Woman is hungry and she wants to eat. Thirsty and she wants to drink. She is on heat and she wants to be fucked. It's nothing to be proud of! Woman is *natural*, that is to say, abominable.'



70
L'Amour aveugle, l'amour sanglant
 (Blind Love, Bloody Love)
 c. 1894
 colour lithograph, 38.5 x 29 cm
 signed bottom left: *de Feure*
 Collection Victor Arwas, London

Like *Fleurs de la grève* (cat. 68), the present lithograph places elements taken from other works in a totally new context. Both nudes appeared in illustrations in *Le Courrier français* in 1893: a younger and more appealing version of the woman on the right in *Au bord de la mer. En fermant les yeux on croirait entendre le tramway* on 2nd April and the one on the left in *Fleurs et fruits* three months later on 9th July.

In a composition highly influenced by Japanese art, the female figures have been situated within a tangle of flowers and fruit, the very lushness of which contrasts sharply with the straight lines of the shaft of light cutting boldly across the image.

In this variation on the theme of sapphic seduction, divine retribution has been exacted on the

female creature who bleeds profusely from wounds caused by having dared to enter the beam of celestial light. Protected from these amorous advances, the woman within the beam has, nevertheless, been blinded by the very intensity of this purifying force.

When the work was included in the third exhibition of Pour L'Art in Brussels in 1895, it was presented under the title *Dans la Fantasmagorie du Rêve, je vis l'Amour sous deux Formes* (sic).



71

Bonne Année!

(Happy New Year!)

c. 1895

lithograph in green, 22.5 x 11 cm

signed bottom right: G de Feure
private collection

This small greetings card by de Feure is executed almost entirely in *crachis* or splatter technique where the artist has used his thumb on the ink-laden brush to spray the surface. The artist's dexterity is visible, not only through the subtle gradations of tone which give each element its form, but also in the treatment of the woman's face as she turns her gaze to the spectator while posting her letters. In the background, the 'Follower' waits for her patiently, at a distance.



72

La Femme fatale

(The Femme Fatale)

1896

colour lithograph, 34.5 x 25.5 cm

signed bottom right: de Feure
Collection Victor Arwas, London

This lithograph was published in the third portfolio of *Etudes de femmes*, a series of prints edited by *Le Livre vert, L'Estampe originale* in 1896 when de Feure was at the height of his second Symbolist phase. During this period, many of his works were dominated by a single female figure associated with a frieze of floral motifs and an imaginary background scene which acted as a complement, visualising the woman's thoughts, fantasies or actions. Often they were devoted to the femme fatale as an implacably cruel creature, one of the artist's major preoccupations at this time.

La Femme fatale, as the title suggests, is the perfect example of this misogynistic representation of woman. She is portrayed in profile, allowing the artist to distort her features to express her corrupt and

perverse nature through a long pointed nose, tight-lipped mouth and jutting chin. As in the cover to *Féminies* (cat. 79), another key work dealing with the femme fatale, a hanging man appears in the background. Here the bubble of his life's breath is about to be burst by the red stamen, shaped like the Devil's tail, arching over from the flower sprouting from the breast of the bird perched on the woman's hand. That women are able to perform magic through flowers is also expressed in a number of other works including the original gouache for the *Salon des Cent* poster (cat. 12) and the oil painting *Marguerite* (fig. 40).

In the background of *La Femme fatale*, the image of three swans, one of which is mortally attacking another, symbolises an eternal triangle and serves to clarify the reason for the woman's vengeance.



73
Dans le rêve
 (In the Dream)
 1897

colour lithograph, 33 x 31 cm
 monogrammed lower left
 Collection Victor Arwas, London

Dans le rêve was published in *L'Album d'estampes originales de la galerie Vollard* in 1897, but was in all probability conceived at an earlier date as the association of a naked female with a towering floral motif is typical of the artist's first Symbolist phase of 1892-1894. In fact, the Symbolist flower in the foreground also appears in de Feure's oil painting *La Voix du mal* (cat. 15) which was exhibited at the Salon de la Société nationale des Beaux-Arts in 1895. It was around this date that de Feure abandoned the practice of incorporating the same element into several different compositions.

The title chosen by the artist for this print is the same as that given by Odilon Redon to his first lithographic album. It is not known whether any particular significance

was attached to this choice, but the print is the only one by de Feure in which a fantastic creature comparable with those imagined by the older artist actually appears. While Redon's intention was to articulate his opposition to the mundanity of Impressionism through the medium of black and white lithography, de Feure invariably opted for the evocative power of colour in his approach to printmaking.



74
Abat-Jour
 (Lampshade)
 1896-1897
 colour lithograph, 49 x 57 cm
 monogrammed lower right
 Collection Victor Arwas, London

De Feure's association with André Marty dates from 1894 when he contributed the lithographic print *La Source du mal* (cat. 69) to *L'Estampe originale*. That same year he became involved in another of Marty's enterprises, L'Artisan Moderne, which was concerned with producing items of interior decoration designed by leading contemporary artists, while limiting costs by using a distribution network based on existing galeries in Paris as well as in Belgium and Germany. The artists who rallied around Marty also included Rupert Carabin, Alexandre Charpentier and Henry Nocq and, although de Feure exhibited a decorated piece of furniture at the Salon in 1894, presumably for L'Artisan Moderne, the entreprise was slow getting off the ground and it was not until

1897 that objects specially produced for Marty were exhibited with any regularity.

The exuberant Art Nouveau floral design of this lithographed lampshade is particularly close in style to a table rug designed by de Feure for l'Artisan Moderne that was exhibited at the Salon in 1897. Marty explicitly referred to a lithographic lampshade in his prospectus and, as many of his outlets were poster and printdealers, it is probable that this work was conceived specifically with them in mind.



75

Bruges mystique et sensuelle
(Mystic and Sensual Bruges)

c. 1898

album of ten colour lithographs (five
illustrated), sheet size 64 x 44 cm
variously signed or monogrammed
various collections



G. de FEURE

Bruges mystique et sensuelle is by far de Feure's most important lithographic album. The original designs were executed during one of his visits to the city during the period 1895-1896, and may well have been conceived at the same time as the drawings to illustrate Georges Rodenbach's *Petites Nocturnes de Bruges*. These were interpreted as woodcuts and published in *L'Image* in May 1897 whereas *Bruges mystique et sensuelle* did not appear until late 1898 or early 1899. The album was published by the avant-garde literary journal *La Plume* in just twenty copies and cost one hundred francs. The original titles were given by the magazine as *Bruges mystique et sensuelle*, *Tentation*, *Celles qui sont honnêtes*, *La Porte de Bruges*, *Le Lac d'amour*, *Retour de vèpres*, *Canal de Damme*, *Au rendez-vous*, *Malgré la neige* and *La Chanson des baisers*, but when the album was exhibited at L'Art Nouveau Bing in March 1903, the following titles were used:



Débauche, *Le Suiveur*, *L'Eclipse*, *L'Aventure*, *Le Marché aux poux* (sic), *Le Drame*, *Le Canal*, *Paysage bizarre*, *Le Paysage nocturne* and *Les Pauvres*.

There seems to be little doubt as to which plate represents, for example, the Flea market, but as the individual prints are not inscribed with the title and some may equally be applied to different images,

identification remains problematic.

In terms of subject matter, paralleling the Symbolist duality in the representation of woman as a femme fatale or a virginal ideal, de Feure has polarised Bruges into two extremes, where under the heading *mystique* may be grouped ideal or imaginary evocations of the city, while *sensuelle* deals with the

concrete, material elements. Thus, among these contrasting images we find the prostitute waiting for a client, beguin nuns making their way home, revellers in a tavern, an excursion on the canal by moonlight and the poor at their hovel on the outskirts of the town.

The album also allows de Feure to explore the whole range of

textures and visual effects offered by the lithographic medium while exploiting to the full the potential of merely two colours for each print.



76
Charité from *Le Courrier français*
 10th July 1892
 (Charity)
 photorelief, 35 x 24 cm
 signed lower right: G de Feure
 Universiteitsbibliotheek, Amsterdam

Charité exemplifies both the Pre-Symbolist caricatural style found in early newspaper illustrations and gouaches and the somewhat rudimentary approach to the theme of the femme fatale during this period. In these works, the relative superiority and domination of woman is symbolised by her dress and social bearing, while the fawning and subservient nature of man is born out by his ragged clothing and the lowly tasks he performs.

Because of (according to the Decadent-Symbolist philosophy of the sexes) woman's innate perversity, even her best intentions have unexpected and disastrous consequences. Like wealthy do-gooders distributing alms, the women decide to favour the woodcutter with a titillating glimpse

of leg and underclothes. However, rather than quenching his thirst or assuaging his hunger as would a drop of water or morsel of food, this tantalising display serves only to increase the misery of his sexual frustration and his sense of inferiority.



77
Kief from *Le Courrier français*
 28th May 1893
 (Kief)
 photorelief, 27.5 x 23.8 cm
 signed centre left: de Feure
 private collection

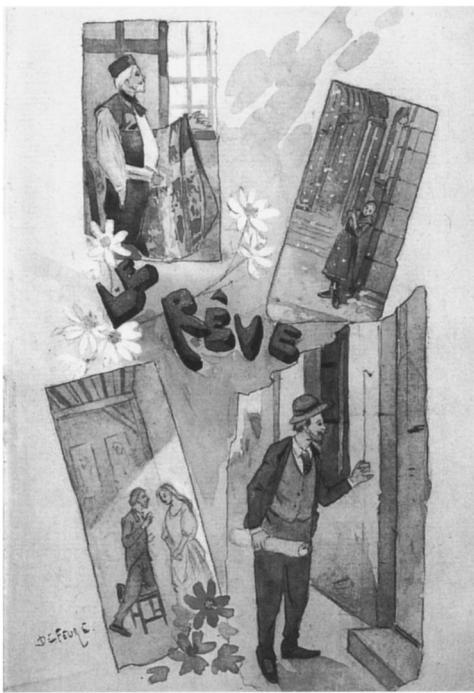
De Feure's *Kief* accompanied a poem of the same name by O. Justice in a special issue of *Le Courrier français* devoted to famine relief in Algeria. With its indolent female nudes, huge, sensuous fruits and boldly voluptuous plant forms, it is one of the most memorable of his newspaper illustrations.

In French, the word 'kief' reflects both its Turkish and Arabic origins, describing either a period of rest from the heat of the midday sun or a mixture of tobacco and Indian hemp or hashish. Justice's poem, with its imagery of silent hills and the aroma of sun-baked olive trees evidently refers to the former meaning, while de Feure's illustration, with a nude languidly outstretched beside a hookah, successfully evokes both senses of the word.

The subject of de Feure's illustration, namely a woman gazing meditatively upon the nakedness of her female lover, is ultimately derived from Baudelaire's *Les Femmes damnées: Delphine et Hippolyte*, one of the poems banned from the original edition of *Les Fleurs du mal*:

*'In the pale light of languishing lamps
 On deep cushions impregnated with
 perfume
 Hippolyte dreamt of the passionate
 caresses
 Which lifted the veil of her youthful
 innocence...'*

*'Reclining at her feet, calm and full of
 joy,
 Delphine savoured her with glowing
 eyes
 Like a powerful animal regards its
 prey
 Having marked it with its teeth...'*



78

Le Rêve by Emile Zola

(The Dream)

1888-1890

copy no. 19 of the first edition,
decorated with thirty watercolour and
gouache compositions of varying
dimensions and formats, all signed:
de Feure
private collection

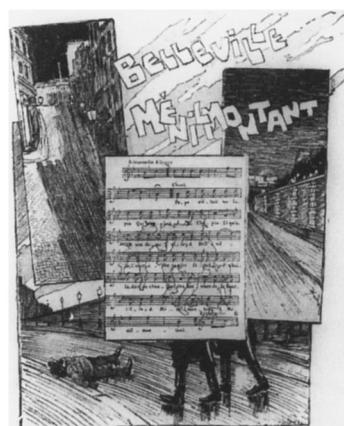
Like many artists, de Feure wished to transform a book into an original work of art by decorating its pages with watercolour or gouache. This copy from the first edition of Emile Zola's *Le Rêve* is probably the earliest known work by the artist.

During his formative years, de Feure seems to have been especially attracted by the novels of the French Naturalist writer, similarly enhancing a copy of *L'Argent* in 1891. *Le Rêve*, which is illustrated throughout with gouache and watercolour compositions, is of particular interest for a variety of reasons. Not only does it represent a relatively large body of work dating from his little known beginnings, but more importantly, these compositions both from the point of view of execution and conception, bear no trace whatsoever of academic training. Rather, they reveal the determination of a young man, at least twenty years old, to cut an independent path and become an artist despite still not having mastered the techniques of drawing.

The curious arrangement of the cover design with four small sketches illustrating different moments of the novel may well have been inspired by such illustrations as Steinlen's *Belleville-Menilmontant* for Aristide Bruant's *Dans la rue*, which was also published in 1888.

The comparison with the 1892 Flammarion edition of *Le Rêve* illustrated by Carlos Schwabe is inevitable, but perhaps of greater significance is that with de Feure's own *La Porte des rêves* (cat. 81) which allows the artist's evolution and contribution in the field of book illustration to be fully appreciated.

■ Fig. 58
Théophile-Alexandre Steinlen
Belleville Menilmontant,
illustration for Dans la rue, 1888
photorelief, 18.7 x 11.7 cm



79

Feminies by Octave Uzanne
(*Feminies*)

1896

etched and stencil-coloured cover,
23.5 x 15.4 cm
signed lower left: de Feure
Collection Jean-Edouard Gautrot,
Paris

This cover design to a volume of eight stories devoted to 'Woman, Love and Beauty' is the perfect example of the femme fatale. Each element serves to illustrate a different facet of the true being hidden behind the mask of beauty: the dagger disguised by a rose reflects her treacherous nature as do the five hanged men on the right; the church engulfed in flames demonstrates that she has no soul or spirituality, while the coins bearing a heart amassed before her clearly express her preoccupation with material gain and her cynical manipulation of her sexuality. Finally, innate corruption is symbolised by the caterpillars crawling on the decorative floral border across the bottom.



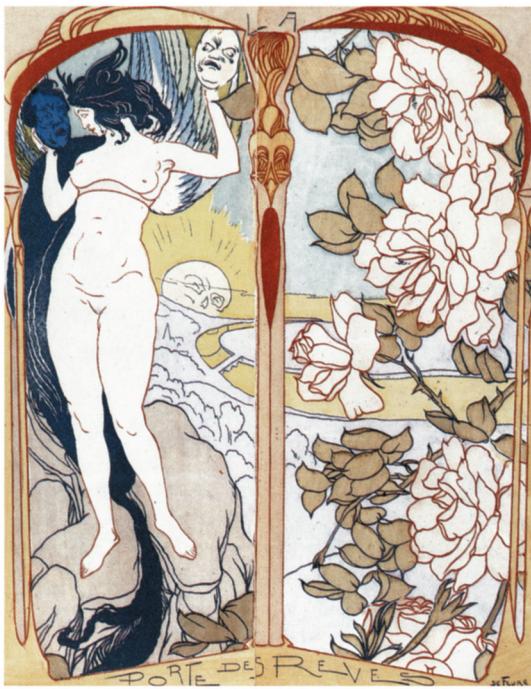
80

Dictionnaire bibliophilosophique by Octave Uzanne
(Biblio-Philosophical Dictionary)
1896
colour lithographic cover, 22 x 14.5 cm
monogrammed and signed bottom
right: De Feure
Collection Jean-Edouard Gautrot, Paris

De Feure's relationship with the art critic and bibliophile Octave Uzanne was established by 1896 with the publication of the writer's *Féminies* (cat. 79) and *Dictionnaire bibliophilosophique* which both had cover designs by the artist, while that same year their collaborative project for *La Porte des rêves* (cat. 81) appears to have taken form. De Feure also designed Uzanne's New Year greetings card for 1897. While the cover for *Féminies* is pure Symbolism, that for the *Dictionnaire bibliophilosophique* is totally Art Nouveau. Although one of the earliest of his works executed in the manner, his dexterity is apparent in the elaborate, stylised floral motif. When the Nancéen, René Wiener, asked de Feure to design two covers so that he might execute them in leather, one of them was a similar floral composition with a high degree of vertical symmetry, while the other (cat. 104) recalled his *La Porte des rêves*. De Feure kept a framed copy of the cover of the *Dictionnaire bibliophilosophique*, or perhaps the original project, in his studio at 5 bis, cité Malesherbes in the early years of this century.

81

La Porte des rêves by Marcel Schwob
(The Door of Dreams)
1898
etched and hand-coloured frontispiece,
21 x 33 cm (open)
signed bottom centre: G De Feure
private collection



La Porte des rêves was de Feure's only venture into the ornamentation of a complete book yet with it he created one of the most significant examples of Symbolist-Art Nouveau illustration. The execution of the illustrations, title pages, decorative borders and tail-pieces took the artist more than two years to complete, influencing and ultimately characterising the art of his late Symbolist period.

The book was published by Octave Uzanne in order to help the Symbolist author, Marcel Schwob, with his medical expenses. Uzanne selected the fifteen tales for the book from two of Schwob's previous publications, *Coeur double* and *Le Roi au masque d'or*, chose de Feure as the illustrator, and even suggested the opening triptych form for the curious frontispiece which gives the

book much of its notoriety.

When closed, the frontispiece resembles a symmetrical window or gateway giving on to the beyond in which a naked female angel contemplates two masks, symbolising day and night, waking and dream, truth and lies or life and death. On opening the triptych we enter a strange world of legend, fairytale and nightmare in which a beautiful princess is transfixed by her own reflection in a mirror, oblivious of the grotesque creatures and beings prancing and frolicking around her in an attempt to break the spell of her own beauty. Her self-absorption and indifference to the outside world recall the egocentricity characteristic of much Symbolist literature and painting, and specifically de Feure's own treatment of The Seven Deadly Sins during this period (cat. 36 and 37).

Henri Frantz, writing in *Le Figaro illustré* in February 1900, noted that the side panels represent the Ideal and Perversity, but he did not specify which was which. In the context of the juxtaposition or duality of these two throughout Schwob's tales and his concern with the nature of truth and falsehood, it is possible that the right-hand panel with its idyllic appearance, in which a sapphic seduction is taking place before the very eyes of the knight who has just returned from his quest, represents Perversity, while the nightmarish scene on the left, with Death looking on as a winged child burns his toys, symbolises the search for the Ideal through the destruction of an infantile, and therefore false, reality.



82

Ensemble du Boudoir du Pavillon de l'Art Nouveau Bing

(Ensemble from the Boudoir of the Art Nouveau Bing Pavilion)

1899-1900

*The Danish Museum of Decorative Art, Copenhagen**Canapé*

(Sofa)

gilded beechwood, embroidery

90 x 117 x 40 cm

Chaise

(Chair)

gilded beechwood, embroidery

99.4 x 40.1 x 39.8 cm

Table

(Table)

gilded beechwood, green leather

70.5 x 70 x 50 cm

Tenture

(Wall-hanging)

silk

45 x 31.5 cm

The items from de Feure's boudoir at the Pavillon de l'Art Nouveau Bing purchased by Pietro Krohn for the Copenhagen Museum of Decorative Art should be considered collectively, as they were intended to be, as integral parts of a harmoniously structured environment. Each element of the interior, from furniture to textiles, metalwork to ceramics, was meticulously designed by the artist as part of a carefully orchestrated ensemble that vaunted the qualities of elegance, purity and grace in the old French tradition that Bing wanted his designers to renew. Although the boudoir, together with the dressing-room, was his first substantial venture into the decorative arts, it revealed de Feure as a highly talented and fully accomplished *artiste-décorateur*, and his contribution to the pavilion was frequently singled out by the critics for special praise as the most perfect expression of Bing's guiding ethos.

The intellectual élitism of the artist, apparent in the subtle approach to subject matter in his Symbolist painting, continued in his decorative art with his overt appeal to sophisticated and expensive taste. Through the muted, anaemic colours of the fabrics and the delicately



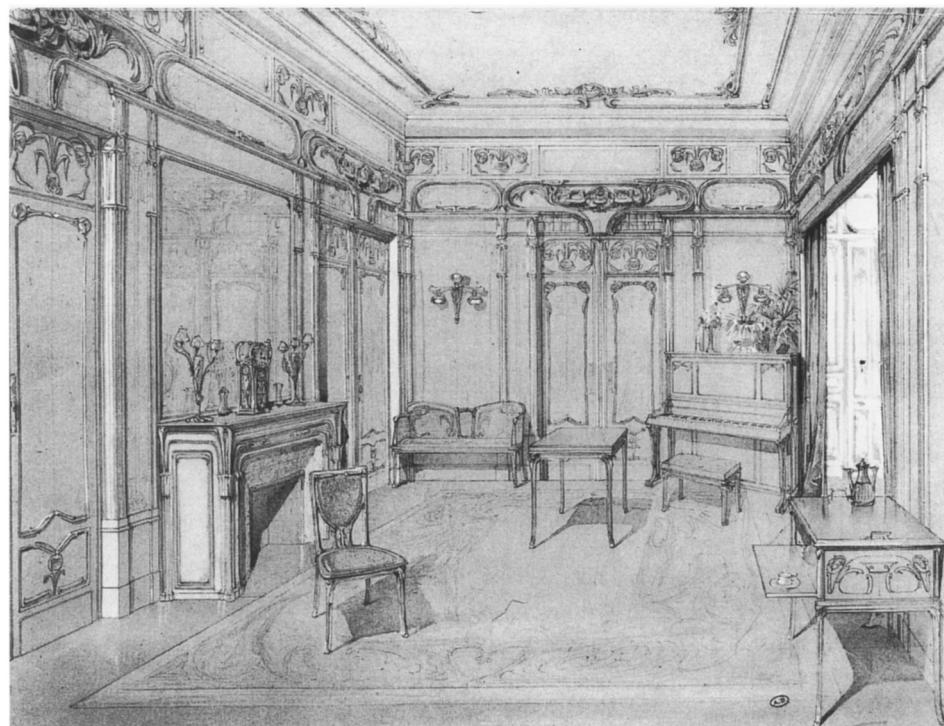
slender forms of the gilded furniture, Decadent sensuality was transmuted into almost effeminate over-refinement. De Feure's intuitive understanding of the female temperament and preferences in interior design would lead to important commissions during his later career, such as the interior presented at the Salon du Mobilier in 1908 for the Maison Krieger and, most notably, the decoration of the Madeleine

Vionnet fashion house in 1923.

Although the objective of Bing and his designers had been to reconcile modernity with tradition and thus create an authentic French style of the times, the Norwegian museum director, Jens Thiis, correctly judged this rococo-derived elegance as reflecting the twilight of a dying age rather than the dawn of a new century.

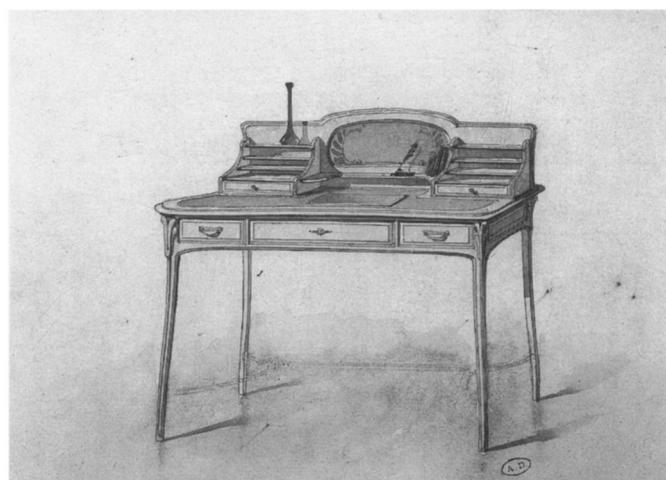
83

Projet pour un Boudoir
(Design for a Boudoir)
1900
pencil, grey wash heightened with
gouache, 38 x 47 cm
Musée des Arts décoratifs, Paris



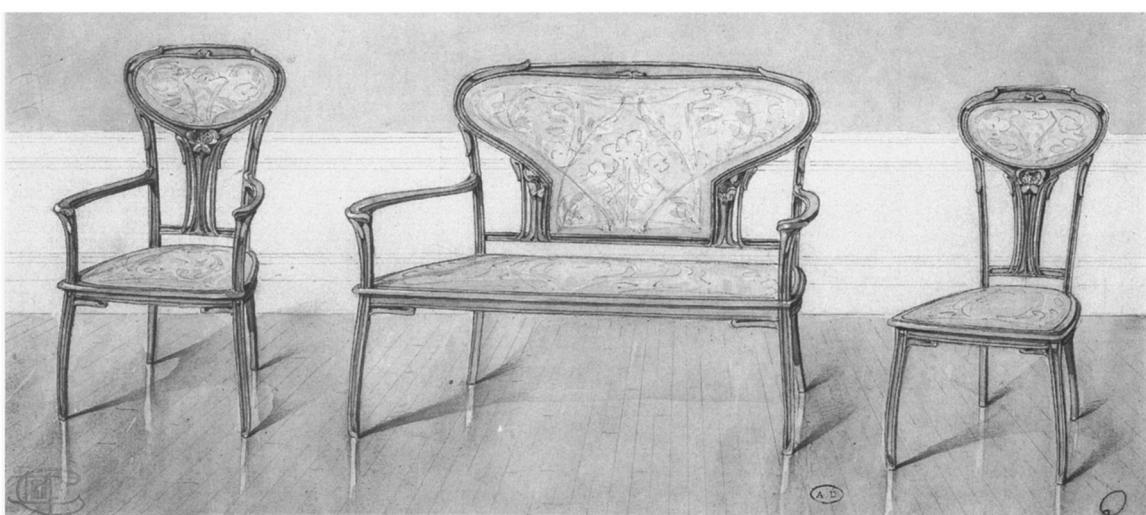
84

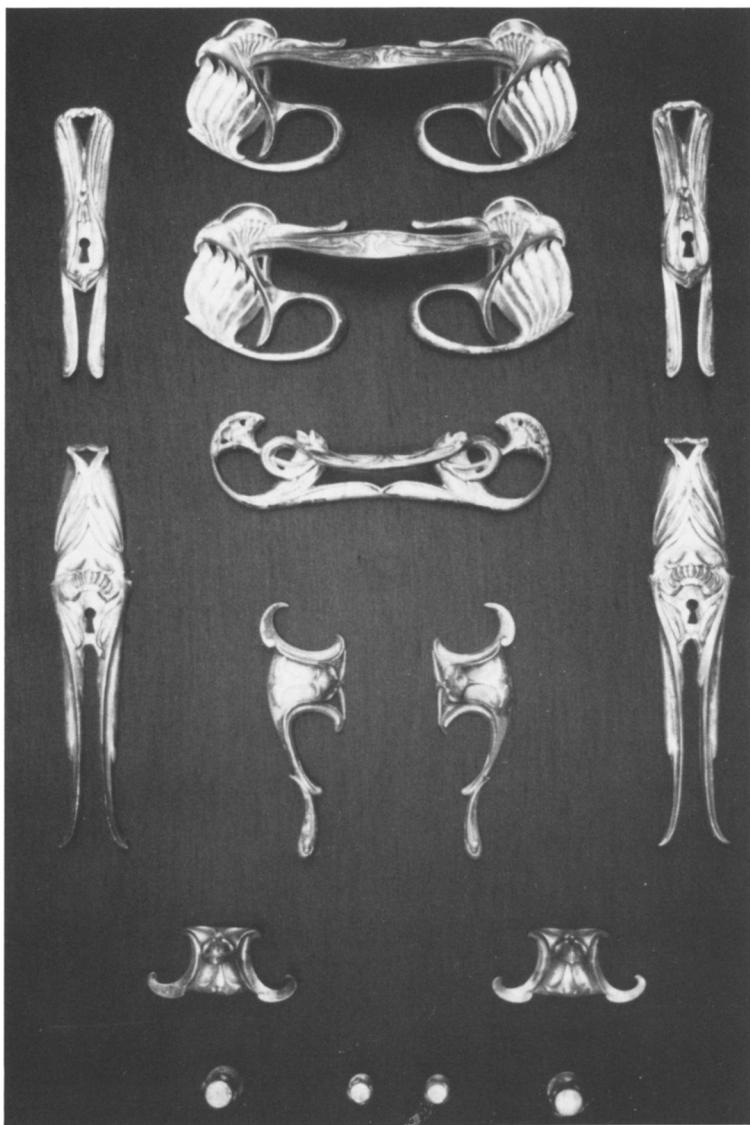
Etude pour un bureau de dame
(Study for a lady's desk)
c. 1900
watercolour over pencil,
20.7 x 29.4 cm
Musée des Arts décoratifs, Paris



85

Etudes pour chaises
(Studies for chairs)
c. 1900
watercolour over pencil,
17.7 x 33.3 cm
Musée des Arts décoratifs, Paris





86

Ferrures de meubles
(Furniture mountings)

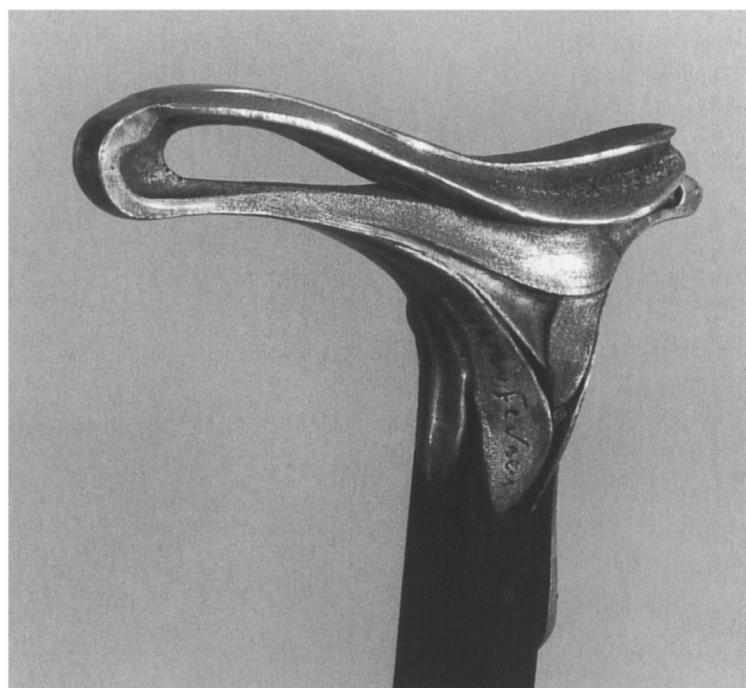
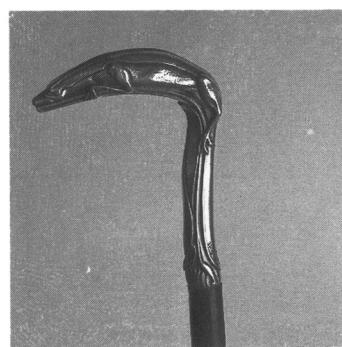
1899-1900

silvered bronze

Victoria & Albert Museum, London

88

Poignée de canne
(Cane handle)
1902-1903
silvered bronze, 9 x 12 cm
signed: *De Feure*
Collection Catherine Dike, Geneva



87

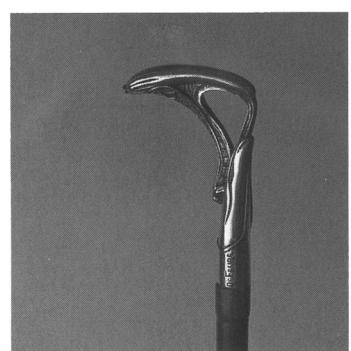
Poignée de canne
(Cane handle)
1895-1896
silvered bronze, 8.5 x 11 cm
signed: *G Van Feuren*
Collection Catherine Dike, Geneva

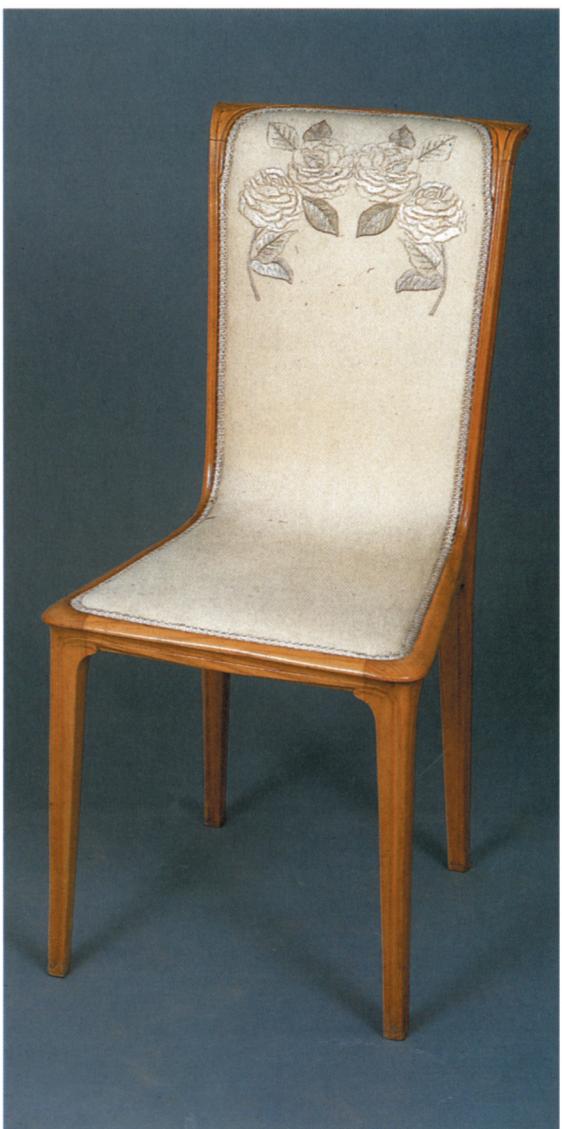
This cane handle, with its variant signature, dates from the artist's Bruges period of 1895-1896 and as such is his earliest known decorative object. Like the *meuble décoré* produced for the Artisan Moderne, which was exhibited at the Salon de la Société nationale des Beaux-Arts

in 1897, the work appears Belgian in conception. The purely abstract whiplash form, which may be compared with the S-shaped ribbon on Jane Scott's sleeve in *Scene de Bruges la Morte* (cat. 21), sets it apart from the artist's later cane handles based on stylised animal and plant forms designed for L'Art Nouveau Bing.

90

Poignée d'ombrelle
(Umbrella handle)
1902-1903
silver, 6.5 x 8 cm
signed: *De Feure*
Collection P. Gutknecht, Geneva





91
Vitrine
(Display Cabinet)
1899-1900
pear-wood
120 x 39 x 220 cm
M. et Mme P. Uhart, Paris

The overall design of this display cabinet is remarkably similar to the one that formed part of de Feure's boudoir at the Exposition universelle in 1900, yet comparison between the two reveals significant differences which go beyond the carved ornamentation. The present work is both larger and ungilded, with the central element deeper and more fully curved.

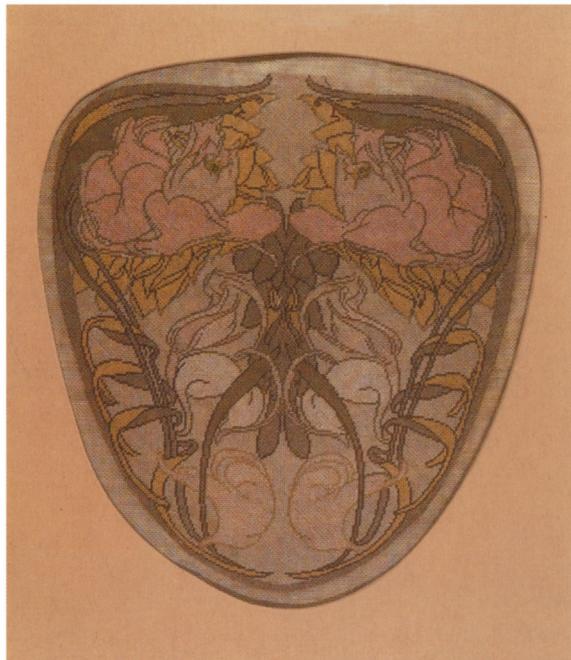
Such variants on a basic model are not unknown in de Feure's Art Nouveau furniture. For example, slightly different versions of his

dressing table have come to light. It may be that the photographs of prototypes together with their prices in Bing's *Album de références* served as a guide to prospective customers who knew that designs could be personalised to suit their own individual taste.

92
Chaise coiffeuse
(Dressing-chair)
1899-1900
Hungarian ash
80 x 40 x 40 cm
Nordenfjeldske Kunstmuseum,
Trondheim

93

Couverture de chaise
(Seat cover)
1900
silk embroidery
54 x 43 cm
Musée des Arts de la Mode, Paris



94

Chocolatière
(Chocolate-pot)
1902
porcelain
h: 27.5 cm
GDA Porcelaines de Limoges



The use of delicate pastel tones, specifically to appeal to a female audience, is apparent throughout de Feure's decorative art.

55

Le Faisan: projet de papier peint
(The Pheasant: project for wallpaper)
1900-1905
gouache on paper, 54 x 80.5 cm
monogrammed bottom right
Collection Gérard Lévy, Paris



96

Tenture

(Wall-hanging)

1899-1900

silk

pattern: 96 x 125 cm

Musée de l'Impression sur Etoffes,

Mulhouse



95

Tenture

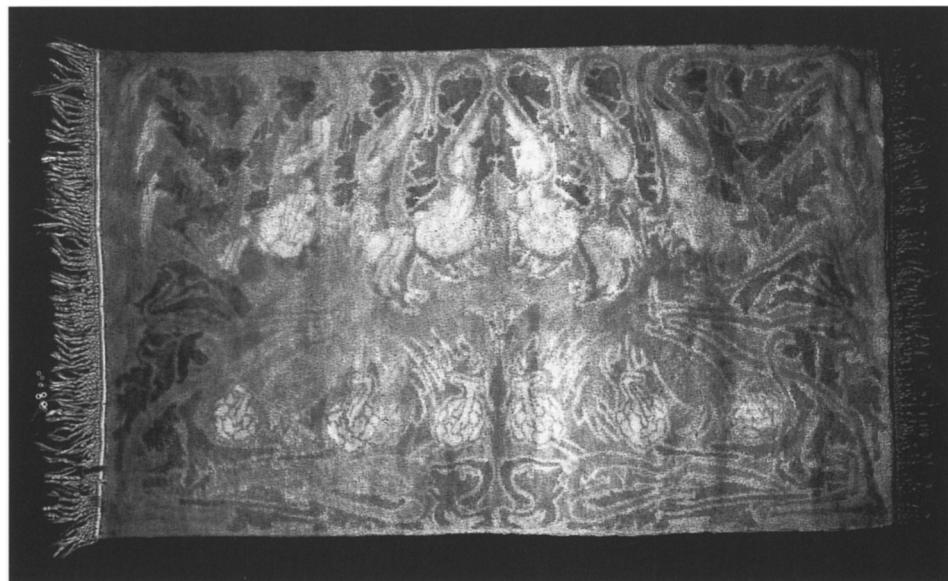
(Wall-hanging)

1899-1900

velvet

pattern: 42.5 x 38 cm

Musée des Arts de la Mode, Paris



97

Tapis (Rug)

1899-1900

silk, 193 x 120 cm

The Danish Museum of Decorative

Art, Copenhagen

98

Couvert à dessert

(Dessert cutlery)

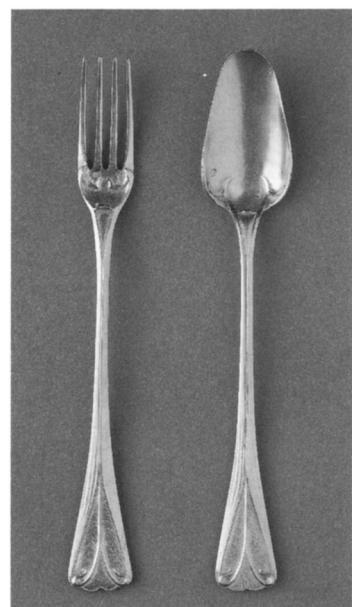
1900

silver

l: 19.5 cm

Gewerbemuseum der LGA im GNM,

Nuremberg



99

Plaquette 'L'Innocence' cf. cat. 40

(Plaque 'Innocence')

c. 1900

silvered bronze

11 x 17 cm

Laurence and Barlach Heuer, Paris



100

Flambeau

(Candlestick)

c. 1900

bronze

h: 34 cm

Collection Gert Driemeyer, Munich

101

Flambeau

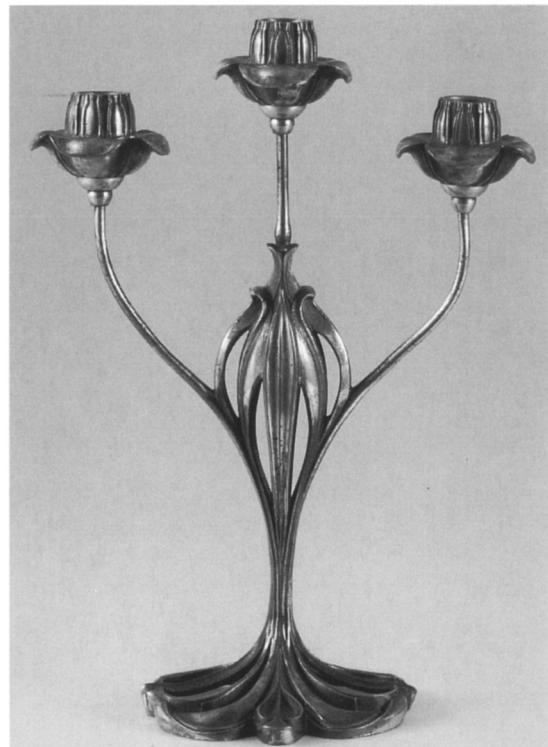
(Candlestick)

1901-1902

silvered bronze

h: 26.5 cm

Musée des Arts décoratifs, Paris



102

Vitrail

(Stained glass window)

1900-1901

221 x 70 cm

private collection

For the inaugural exhibition of l'Art Nouveau in December 1895, Bing commissioned cartoons for stained glass windows from eleven artists who, with the exception of Albert Besnard, P.-A. Isaac and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, were all leading Nabis. Although Bing was pleased with the results, once he decided to enter into the manufacture and edition of furniture and elements of interior decoration under his personal supervision, the only artist he entrusted with the design of stained glass was de Feure. Whereas the American, Louis Comfort Tiffany, had been judged most capable of rendering the Nabi designs in stained glass, those by de Feure were executed by the firm of Müller Hickler in Darmstadt.

In an article entitled 'La Vitrine de G. de Feure', published in *L'Art décoratif* in June 1901, Charles Torquet digressed at length on the artist's interest in latest production methods and his close collaboration with the specialists. He related how this had been of particular benefit in the field of stained glass, where the lead lines had been reduced to a minimum with the effect of lightening the composition and increasing its luminosity.

The first presentation of stained glass by de Feure was at the Exposition universelle in 1900 when panels symbolising The Four Seasons formed a short passageway between his boudoir and Eugène Gaillard's bedroom in the Pavillon de l'Art Nouveau Bing. These designs have apparently been lost, as have those for Olivier Sainsère, a Conseiller d'Etat and notable collector and, given the fragile nature of the medium, it is not surprising that surviving examples of de Feure's stained glass are rare. To date, only three such works have been located, one of which was reproduced in colour in René Puaux's *Oeuvres de Georges de Feure* and today forms part of the Sidney and Frances Lewis Collection at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. The



remaining two are different versions of the same design which was based on an oil panel that formed part of de Feure's decoration for a dining-room of the Restaurant Konss in Paris. It is evident from the painting



103

Lampe électrique

(Electric Lamp)

1900

silvered bronze with Tiffany glass
h: 55 cm

Collection Félix Marcilhac, Paris

In all, de Feure produced some seventeen designs for lighting appliances, ranging from candlesticks and candelabra to electric lamps and even a chandelier. Although all are based on plant forms, none attains the same degree of organic decoration as this lamp. Its functional purpose as a source of light is almost totally dissimilated by the curving leaves and stems and the tulip-like shades in favrile glass by Tiffany. The single stem and vertical symmetry that characterised his other models have been abandoned and a narrow glass vase placed discreetly at the centre of the twisting stalks allows the lamp to hold a bouquet of flowers.



104

Reliure
(Bookbinding)

1897-1898

morocco-leather

29.5 x 22.5 cm

executed by René Wiener after the
design by Georges de Feure
Musée de l'Ecole de Nancy

In his article 'French Bookbindings', published in *The Studio* in October 1899, Octave Uzanne related how René Wiener, a craftsman from Nancy, asked artists including Toulouse-Lautrec, Hans Christiansen, George Auriol and de Feure to provide him with designs for bookcovers that he would subsequently execute in leather. De Feure's correspondence with Wiener dating from November 1897 is conserved at the Cabinet des Estampes, Bibliothèque nationale, Paris under the reference D.11246 and reveals not only that de Feure

produced two cover designs, but dropped his price from 250 Francs to 100 Francs after Wiener had spoken to the print dealer Kleinmann.

Executed at the time when de Feure was working on *La Porte des rêves* (cat. 81), the design may well have originally been destined to grace Schwob's book, but the volume thus bound is, in fact, Uzanne's *L'Art dans la décoration extérieure des livres*. Another version of the binding is known, this time for the revue *L'Image*.

105

Portefeuille
(Portefolio)

1902-1903

leather

21 x 15 cm

executed by Ribe-Roy after the design
by Georges de Feure
Musée des Arts décoratifs, Paris



106

Peigne à chignon

(Hair-comb)

1900-1903

carved horn

7.5 x 9 cm

Musée des Arts décoratifs, Paris

107

Peigne à chignon

(Hair-comb)

1900-1903

carved horn

7.5 x 10 cm

Musée des Arts décoratifs, Paris

108

Encrier

(Inkpot)

1900

porcelain

h: 9 cm

GDA Porcelaines de Limoges

109

Porte-allumettes

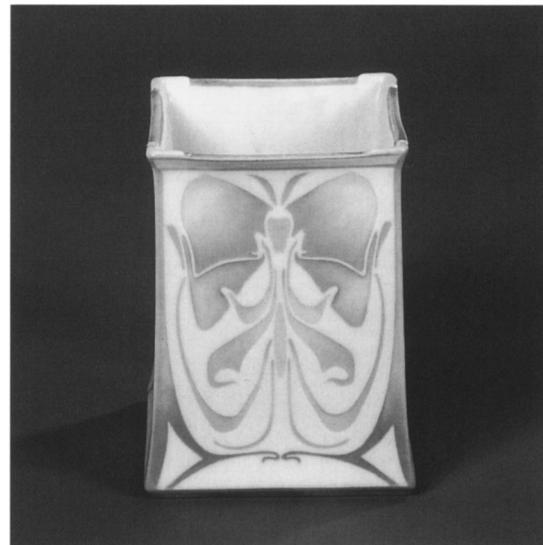
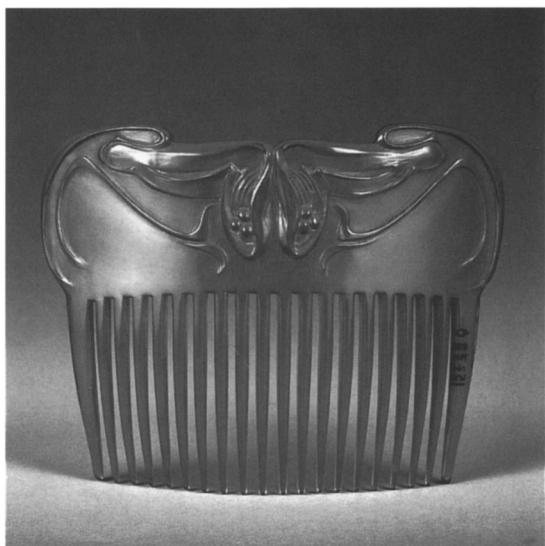
(Match-container)

1902

porcelain

h: 6.5 cm

GDA Porcelaines de Limoges



110

Vase aux anses en forme de femmes
(Vase with handles in the form of women)

1899-1900

porcelain

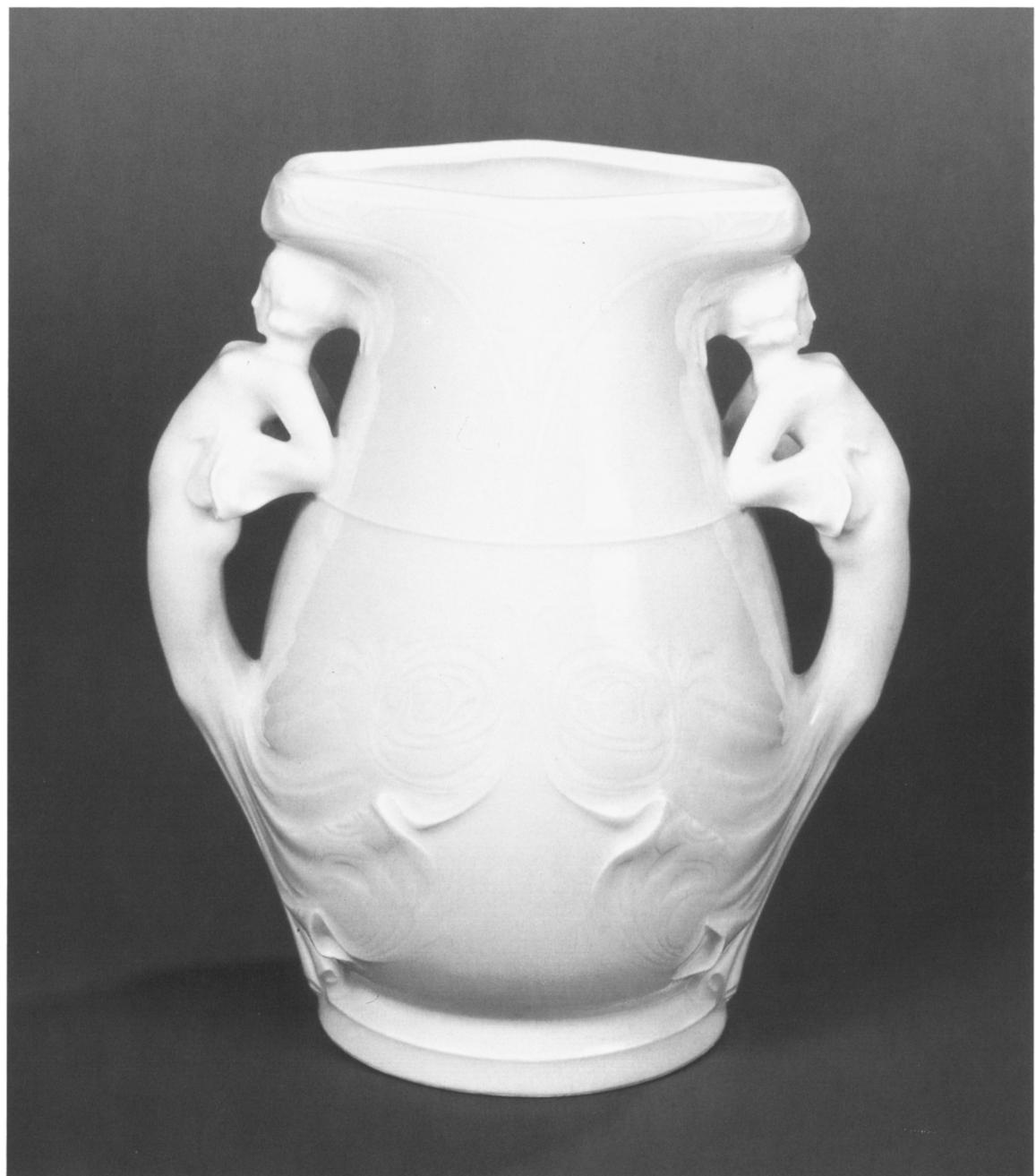
height 23.5 cm

Musée national Adrien Dubouché,
Limoges

This plain white porcelain vase is highly significant for the history of de Feure and L'Art Nouveau Bing as it may be proof of a collaboration between the artist and the Limoges manufactory predating his association with Bing. The vase bears the stamp of Gérard, Dufraisseix et Morel, a form of the enterprise that disappeared in 1897. It was replaced by Gérard, Dufraisseix et Cie which then became Gérard, Dufraisseix et Abbot in 1900. However, the stamp with the name of Morel was still sometimes used even in 1900.

The vase was not attributed to de Feure in the Museum records, although it is undoubtedly by de Feure and is reproduced in several publications of the period including René Puaux's *Oeuvres de Georges de Feure* which appeared at the time of the retrospective at L'Art Nouveau Bing in March 1903.

It is doubtful, for stylistic reasons, that the vase dates from 1897, but it is certainly the earliest known example of porcelain by de Feure.



111

Bonbonnière
(Sweet-box)

c. 1900

porcelain

8.7 x 22.4 x 8 cm

Musée national Adrien Dubouché,
Limoges



112

Vase 'La Neige'

(Vase called 'Snow')

c. 1902

porcelain

h: 21 cm

GDA Porcelaines de Limoges



113

Vase 'L'Orchidée'

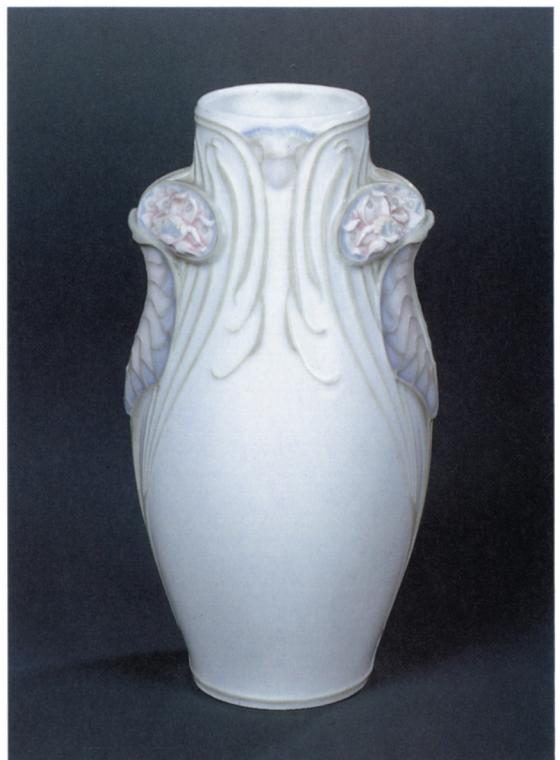
('Orchid' Vase)

1900

porcelain

h: 21 cm

GDA Porcelaines de Limoges



114

Vase

(Vase)

c. 1902

stoneware

h: 37 cm

Collection Félix Marcilhac, Paris



115

Vase (Vase)

c. 1902

porcelain

h: 31.5 cm, diam: 14.5 cm

Collection Gert Driemeyer, Munich

116

Bonbonnière (Sweet-box)

c. 1902

porcelain

18.5 x 12.5 cm

Collection Gert Driemeyer, Munich

117

Vase quadrangulaire
(Rectangular Vase)

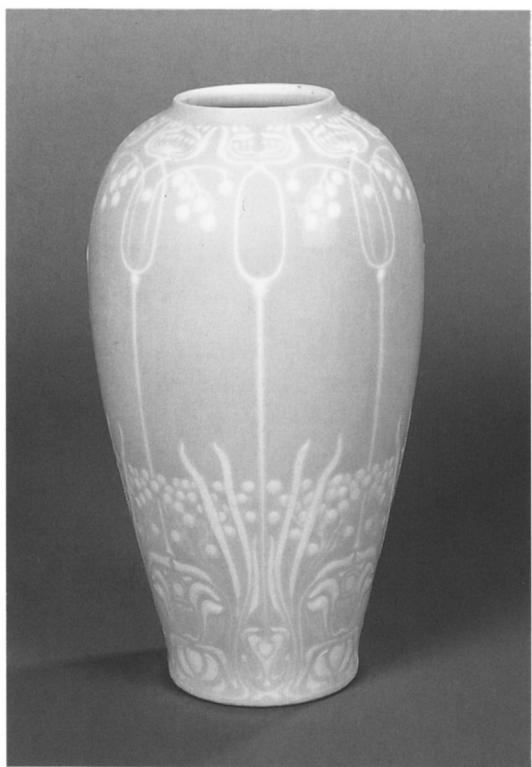
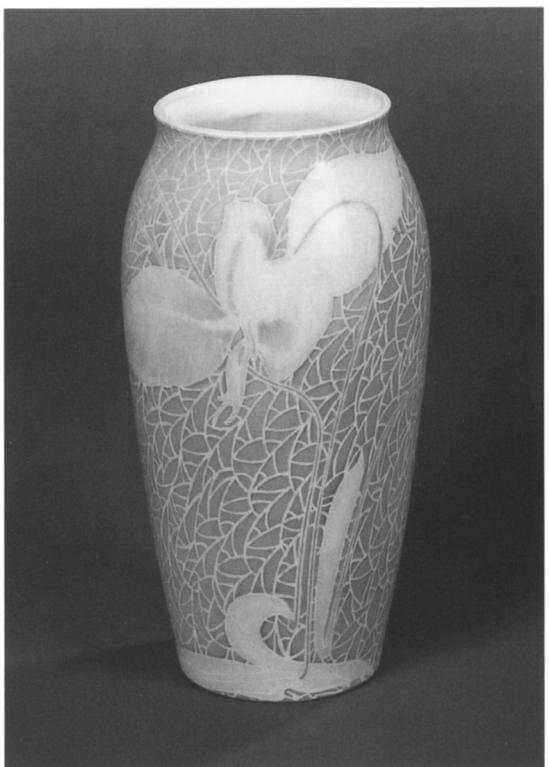
1903

porcelain

h: 21.5 cm

GDA Porcelaines de Limoges





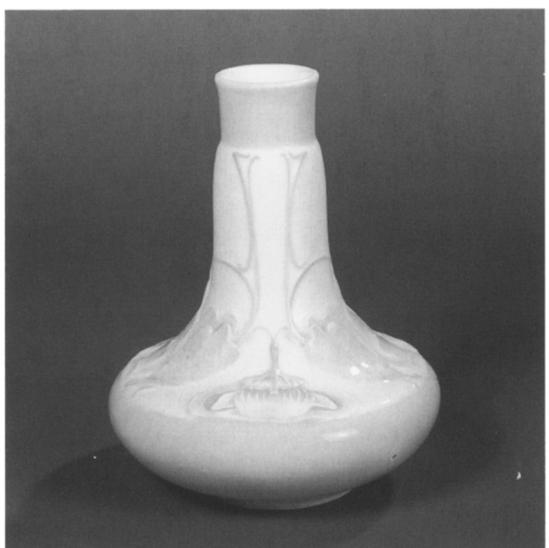
118
Vase
(Vase)
1901
porcelain
h: 20.5 cm
GDA Porcelaines de Limoges

119
Vase
(Vase)
1901
porcelain
h: 28 cm
GDA Porcelaines de Limoges

120
Bonbonnière
(Sweet-box)
1903
porcelain
h: 8 cm
GDA Porcelaines de Limoges

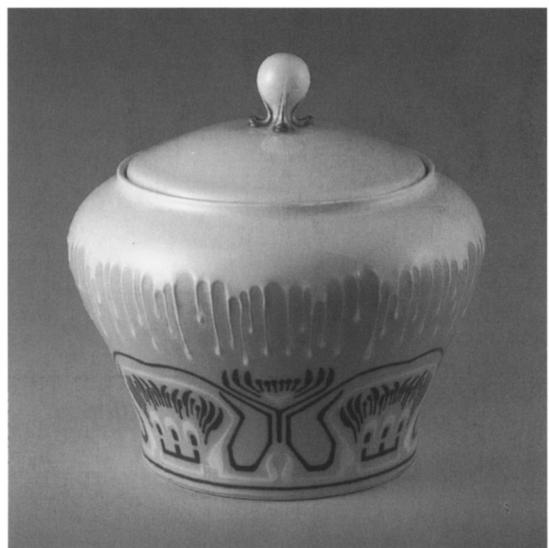


121
Bonbonnière
(Sweet-box)
1903
porcelain
h: 8 cm
GDA Porcelaines de Limoges



122
Vase
(Vase)
1902
porcelain
h: 21 cm
GDA Porcelaines de Limoges

123
Sucrier
(Sugar-pot)
1900
porcelain
h: 13.5 cm
Musée des Arts décoratifs, Paris



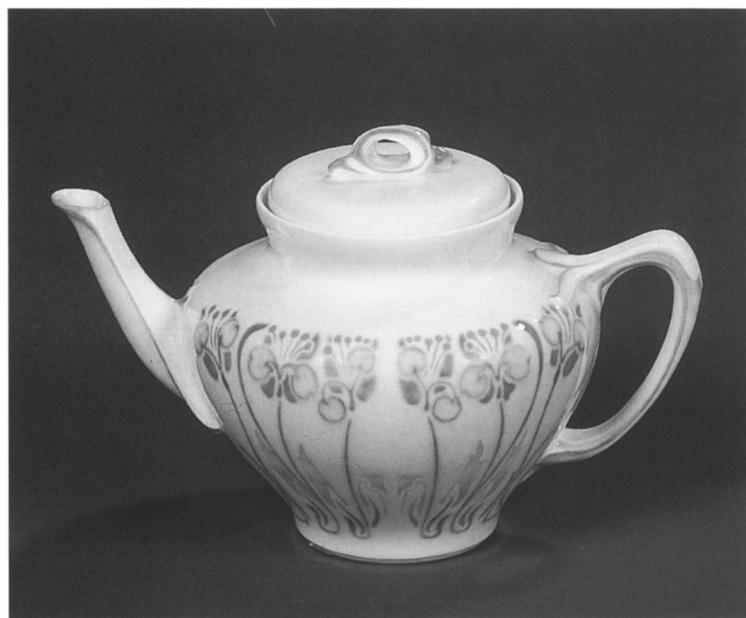
124

Tasse à thé et sa soucoupe
(Cup and saucer)
c. 1901
porcelain
h (cup): 4.7 cm, diam (saucer): 13.7 cm
Musée des Arts décoratifs, Paris



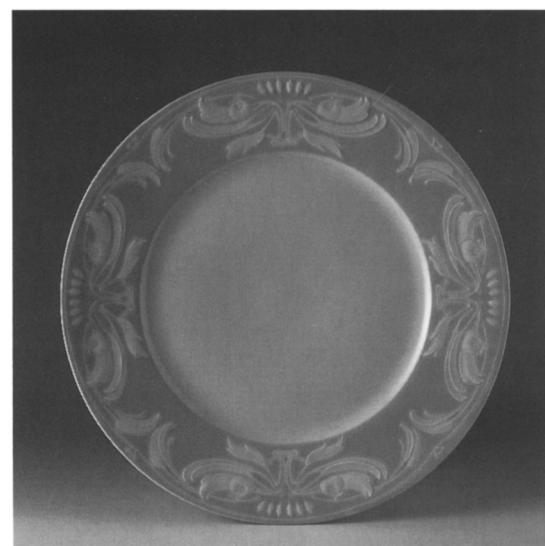
125

Théière
(Teapot)
1901
porcelain
h: 11.5 cm
GDA Porcelaines de Limoges



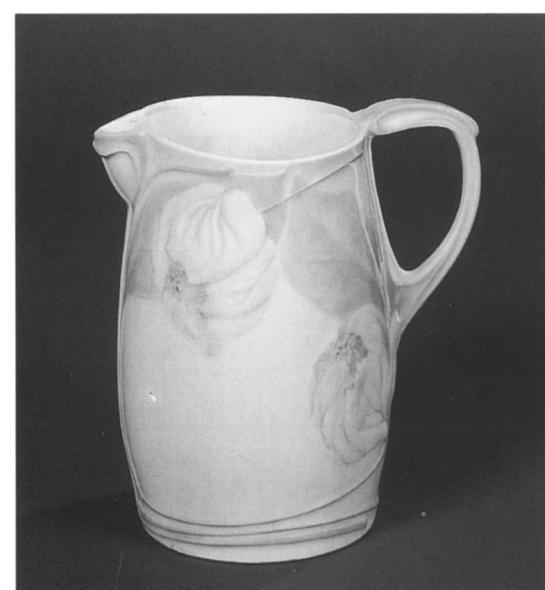
126

Assiette
(Plate)
1900-1901
porcelain
diam: 21.5 cm
Musée des Arts décoratifs, Paris



128

Seau à glace
(Ice-bucket)
c. 1900
porcelain
h: 20 cm
Musée national Adrien Dubouché, Limoges

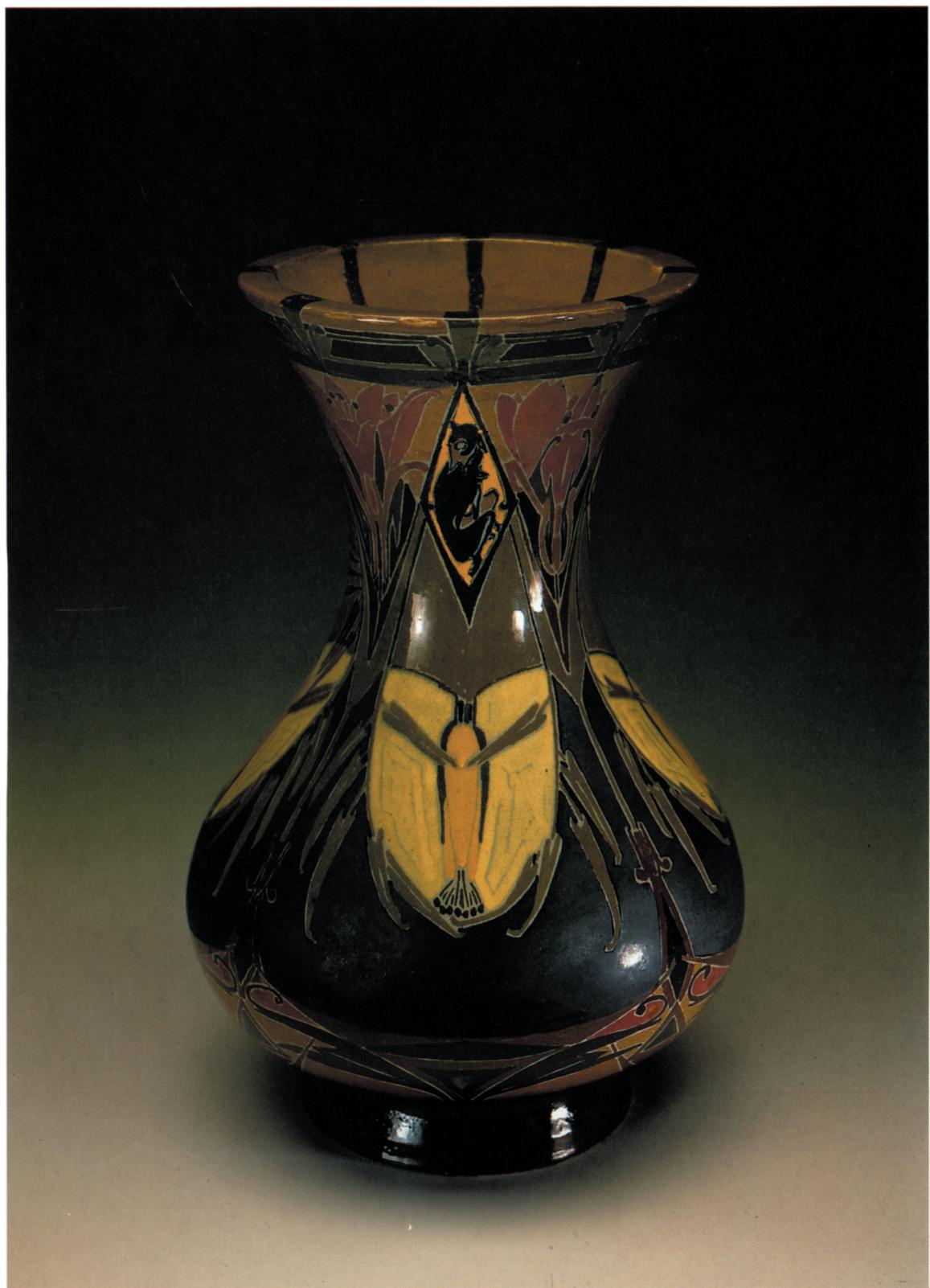


129

Pichet
(Jug)
1901
porcelain
h: 15.5 cm
GDA Porcelaines de Limoges

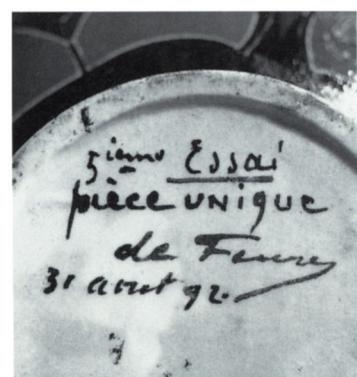
130
Vase décoré
(Decorated vase)
1912
porcelain
height 28.5 cm

signed and inscribed on the base:
5ième Essai
pièce unique
de Feure
31 août 12
Laurence and Barlach Heuer, Paris



As the inscription on the base attests, this extraordinary vase was the fifth attempt at achieving a satisfactory result. It was created in August 1912 in conjunction with Jean-Jacques Lachenal, one of the sons of the famous ceramist Edmond Lachenal, who was probably responsible for producing the blank as well as firing it after de Feure had decorated it. Their collaboration continued over a number of years, spanning the late Art Nouveau period to Art Déco. The pattern, executed in deep blue, purple, olive green and yellow is elaborate but by no means overpowering. There is a certain angularity in the plant forms typical of de Feure's late Art Nouveau, but the motif of the wolf harks back to de Feure's Symbolist work, in particular certain of the tailpieces for *La Porte des rêves*.

Although the parameters for the present exhibition are 1890-1905, this vase has been chosen specially to close the catalogue by underlining both the rupture and continuity in de Feure's decorative art following the demise of L'Art Nouveau Bing and the death of its proprietor.



Correspondence

Given the rarity of documents concerning Georges de Feure, it seems desirable on the occasion of this exhibition consecrated to his Symbolism and Art Nouveau to reproduce full translations of his known correspondence dating from the period 1890-1905 which would otherwise remain unpublished.

1. Letter to Léon Riotor (author of an article on the artist published in *La Plume*) dating from September 1892:

You are truly the first person in France to whom I am indebted, in this terrible profession of doubt and disappointment. Besides the sole pleasure that our little inventions give us, it is good to meet a kindred spirit, a generous hand that offers us help.

Quoted in Ernest Raynaud, *Les Figures de Maintenant, Paris, 1919*, pp. 22-23

2. Undated visit card to André Marty (publisher of *L'Estampe originale* and founder of L'Artisan Moderne):

My Dear Marty,
Today I must go to Chartres for some business of the greatest importance - let's put off the trip to Asnières to tomorrow which works out exactly the same as the workers will not be working tomorrow Sunday anyway - until tomorrow then, nine o'clock - without fail.
De Feure

Collection Jean-Edouard Gautrot, Paris

3. Undated visit card to André Marty :

Georges de Feure, 14, rue Navarin

My Dear Marty,
I will be at your place at nine-thirty tomorrow morning to go to Asnières - to start the stones - All the best.
d.F.

Collection Jean-Edouard Gautrot, Paris

4. Undated letter to André Marty

Friday

My Dear Marty,
It still hasn't been possible for me to do your drawing - when I have the pleasure of seeing you around next Wednesday - I'll try to give it to you.
Cordially,
G. de Feure

Collection Jean-Edouard Gautrot, Paris

5. Letter to Edouard Kleinmann (poster and print dealer):

Paris, 10th March 1897

Dear Mr Kleinmann,
Please give to the bearer the two drawings on Bruges so that I can have them photographed in order for them to appear in the next issue of *L'Image* with Rodenbach's text - as you were good enough to allow me to do so I am profiting from your kindness.
I will return them in a few days, the time to have them engraved.
I thank you enormously my dear Kleinmann and I warmly shake your hand.

de Feure, 15. R Bréda

Sale Hôtel Drouot, Paris, 28th October 1981, No. 215

6. Letter to René Wiener (leatherworker):

Paris 12 Nov 1897

Sir,

I have received both your letters at the same time and I am hurrying to answer you. I will do with pleasure your two bindings and will ask you the same prices that Uzanne gives me

- with figures 250 francs

- without figures 200 francs

It will be very kind of you to let me know if the binding must be illustrated on both sides that's to say like this: (sketch of open book cover)

As soon as I have your answer I will get to work.

Yours faithfully,

G. de Feure, 35 rue Boissy d'Anglas, Paris

Bibliothèque nationale, Cabinet des Estampes, Paris, S.N.R.
D 11246

7. Letter to René Wiener:

Paris 17 No 1897

Sir,

If the drawing that you are asking me for is not too complicated, I am prepared to do it, as a favour to you, for 100 fr, hoping that our future relations will lead to more important work. Therefore please send me the coloured leathers and the explanation of what you want as subject and lettering.

Yours faithfully,

G. de Feure, 35, rue Boissy-d'Anglas, Paris

I hadn't spoken to Kleinmann of any price under 250 fr, why does he tell you the opposite ?

Bibliothèque nationale, Cabinet des Estampes, Paris, S.N.R.
D 11246

8. Letter to André Marty:

Paris 3 D 1897

My Dear Marty,

Couldn't you call by my studio one morning from ten-thirty to noon - we'll have a chat.
While looking forward to the pleasure of seeing you, I warmly shake your hand.
de Feure, 35 rue Boissy-d'Anglas

Collection Jean-Edouard Gautrot, Paris

9. Letter to André Marty on headed notepaper:

Hotel Cecil, Strand W C, 27 D 1897

My Dear Marty,

Please excuse me to the gentlemen of the Artisan

Moderne association for having missed last Friday's meeting. I was in London. Until Friday then.
de Feure

Collection Jean-Edouard Gautrot, Paris

10. Undated letter to Henri Flourey (bookdealer and publisher of *La Porte des rêves*):

Monday

Dear Mr Flourey,
Here are the last three of Mr Raisin's drawings. I won't be coming myself today as a sore throat is keeping me in bed. Can I count on this blasted cash for tomorrow. I'll have someone come by your shop tomorrow. Please be good enough to do me this favour.
Please accept my warmest regards.
de Feure, 36 rue Pergolèse

Collection Jean-Edouard Gautrot, Paris

11. Undated visit card:

Dear Sir,
Please be good enough to excuse me for not going to the printer's. My wife has gone into hospital it has shaken us so much that I have been totally distracted.
Please excuse me, I beg you. All the best.
de Feure, 11, Bd Clichy

Collection Jean-Edouard Gautrot, Paris

12. Letter to Léon Deschamps (editor of *La Plume* and organiser of the Salon des Cent exhibitions):

My Dear Deschamps,
It would be very good of you if you could give to my friend Silvestre the poster project that you have in your exhibition. I absolutely need it today. I will come tomorrow morning bringing you what you asked me for yesterday.
All the best.
de Feure

Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet, Paris, M.N.R. Béta 579

13. Letter to Léon Deschamps:

Paris, 12 April 1899

My Dear Deschamps,
As you were not alone yesterday, I couldn't talk to you about an offer I had to make to you - here it is: Naturally having a very urgent need of money - I am prepared to sell you all my rights on the edition "Bruges mystique et sensuelle" for the price of 250 frs - in addition I will do you a poster "Salon de Cent" in 3 colours - a woman straddling a feather and rising towards the Ideal - this within a month. You will give me ten copies of it before the lettering. I will need the money before next Friday evening - I will call by to see you tomorrow and you will give me your answer.
All the best. de Feure

Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet, Paris, M.N.R. Béta 579

14. Letter to Léon Deschamps:

27 April 99

My Dear Deschamps,
I didn't insist too much when I was with you today that you have me paid straightforward for the colouring of the "Portes des Rêves" because I was hoping to see you elsewhere this evening - that didn't work and I absolutely need money. I did this work at an absolutely derisory price counting only on the interest of being paid immediately - in this difficult period I'm going through. Therefore be insistant with Mr. Fermiot so that he does me the favour of paying me for this work now - I will call by at your place tomorrow afternoon - if it bothers you to ask him - do you want me to contact him myself?
I am counting on your friendship to do me this favour.
All the best. de Feure

Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet, Paris, M.N.R. Béta 579

15. Postcard to Léon Deschamps:

28.4.99

My Dear Deschamps,
Have you seen Mr. Fermiot for the payment of my work?
I will come by tomorrow - I am counting absolutely on it for tomorrow - I will call by at your place.
All the best. de Feure

Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet, Paris, M.N.R. Béta 579

16. Letter to M. Gérard (Director of Gérard, Dufraisseix et Abbot, manufacturers of de Feure's porcelain designs):

Atelier de Feure
5 bis cité Malesherbes
Paris

Paris, 24 April 1901

Dear Mr. Gérard,
I have the pleasure of informing you that the objects manufactured by you have an ever increasing success.
Please ask Mr. Galatry to tell you about my last letter.
I must thank you for having Mr. Dammouse give me his support, he could not have been nicer.
Would you be kind enough to use your influence on him so that he proposes me at the Société nationale des Beaux-Arts (where I have been an associate since 1894) as a member in the objets d'art section, which would allow us next year to enlarge our presentation. On my side, I will work very actively on Besnard, Prouvé and Thesmar for my nomination.
Please let me know of your arrival in Paris, I will be very happy to shake your hand.
Your very devoted, G. de Feure

Collection GDA Porcelaines de Limoges

17. Notelet to his parents:

Atelier de Feure
5 bis cité Malesherbes
Paris

8 August 1901

My Dear Parents,
My nomination as Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur was officially published today.

Let's hope that it will make things a little bit easier on the path towards happiness for everyone.
I embrace you very warmly,
your son
Georges

Private collection

18. Letter to Rodolphe Darzens, poet:

1 July 1904

My dear Darzens,
It would be very good of you to give to the bearer the full address of Madame Pola Dorian.
With thanks and a warm handshake,
G de Feure
8 rue Cernuschi

Private collection

19. Letter to Tadamasa Hayashi (Japanese collector and associate of Bing):

14 June 1904

Dear Sir,
Being ill I am sending one of my friends to show you two watercolours. I left the Bing enterprise in an unexpected manner and so find myself momentarily very short of money and it would be a real favour that you would do me by buying these two watercolours that I will let you have at the exceptional price of 800 francs for the two. You know that Mr. Bing sells the same at 600 and 800 francs each.
Counting on your kindness,
Yours faithfully,
G. de Feure

Tokyo National Research Institute of Cultural Properties,
Tokyo

Exhibitions

1892
Deuxième Exposition des Peintres impressionnistes et symbolistes. Galerie Le Barc de Boutteville, Paris, undated (May-June?) 1892

Troisième Exposition des Peintres impressionnistes et symbolistes. Galerie Le Barc de Boutteville, Paris, undated (November-December?) 1892

1893
Deuxième Salon de la Rose+Croix. Palais du Champ-de-Mars, Paris, 28 March-30 April 1893

Cinquième Exposition des Peintres impressionnistes et symbolistes. Galerie Le Barc de Boutteville, Paris, undated (October-November?) 1893

1894
Aquarelles par Georges de Feure. Galerie des Artistes modernes, Paris, 12-24 March 1894

Troisième Salon de la Rose+Croix. Galerie des Artistes contemporains, Paris, 8 April-7 May 1894

Salon de la Société nationale des Beaux-Arts. Champ-de-Mars, Paris, 1894

Quatrième Salon des Cent. Salon du Casino, Boulogne-sur-Mer, 1-31 August 1894

Cinquième Salon des Cent. *La Plume*, Paris, 5-30 October 1894

1895
Septième Salon des Cent. *La Plume*, Paris, December 1894-January 1895

Pour l'Art. Brussels, 1895

Dixième Salon des Cent. *La Plume*, Paris, 8-30 March 1895

Salon de la Société nationale des Beaux-Arts. Champ-de-Mars, Paris, 1895

1896
Salon de la Société nationale des Beaux-Arts. Champ-de-Mars, Paris, 1896

1897
Salon de la Société nationale des Beaux-Arts. Champ-de-Mars, Paris, 1897

1898
Salon de la Société nationale des Beaux-Arts. Champ-de-Mars, Paris, 1898

1899
Deuxième Exposition des Peintres lithographes. Salle du Figaro, Paris, 10-25 January 1899

1900
Exposition universelle. Paris, 1900

1901
Huitième Exposition de la Libre Esthétique. Brussels, 1-31 March 1901

Salon de la Société nationale des Beaux-Arts. Paris, 1901

Exposition des Arts appliqués à la décoration des tissus. Rouen, 1901

1902
Salon de la Société nationale des Beaux-Arts. Grand Palais, Paris, 1902

Espozizione Internazionale d'Arte Decorativa Moderna in Torino. Turin, 1902

1903
Exposition des Oeuvres de Georges de Feure à l'Art Nouveau Bing. L'Art Nouveau Bing, Paris, 30 March-20 April 1903

Salon de la Société nationale des Beaux-Arts. Grand Palais, Paris, 1903

Tentoonstelling van Schilderijen, Aquarellen, Tekeningen en Kunstvoorwerpen door George de Feure. Haagsche Kunskring, The Hague, 21 October-9 November 1903

1904
Salon d'Automne. Grand Palais, Paris, 15 October-15 November 1904

1925
Les Rénovateurs de l'Art appliqué 1890 à 1910. Musée Galliéra, Paris, 1925

1933
Le Décor de la vie sous la III^e République de 1870 à 1900. Pavillon de Marsan, Musée du Louvre, Paris, April-July 1933

1936
Cinquantenaire du symbolisme. Bibliothèque nationale, Paris, 1936

1937

Le Décor de la vie de 1900 à 1925. Pavillon de Marsan, Musée du Louvre, Paris, 1937

1960

Les Sources du XX^e siècle: Les Arts en Europe de 1884 à 1914. Musée national d'Art moderne, Paris, 1960-1961

1970

Esthètes et magiciens: Symbolistes des collections parisiennes. Musée Galliera, Paris, December 1970-January 1971

1972

French Symbolist Painters. Hayward Gallery, London, 7 June-23 July 1972; Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, 9 August-17 September 1972

1975

Japonisme: Japanese Influence on French Art 1854-1910. The Cleveland Museum of Art, 9 July-31 August 1975; The Rutgers University Art Gallery, 4 October-16 November 1975; The Walters Art Gallery, 10 December 1975-26 January 1976

Le Symbolisme en Europe. Museum Boymans-Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, November 1975-January 1976; Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels, January-March 1976; Staatliche Kunsthalle, Baden-Baden, March-May 1976; Grand Palais, Paris, May-July 1976

1976

Art Nouveau Belgium - France. Rice Museum, Houston, 26 March-27 June 1976; The Art Institute, Chicago, 28 August-31 October 1976

Le Parisien chez lui au XIX^e siècle. Archives nationales, Paris, 1976-1977

1978

Images of Women: Printmakers in France from 1830 to 1930. Museum of Fine Arts, Utah, 8 January-19 February 1978

1979

Ukiyo-e Prints and the Impressionist Painters: Meeting of the East and the West. Tokyo, 15 December 1979-15 January 1980; Osaka, 22 January-10 February 1980; Fukuoka, 15 February-28 February 1980; Tokyo, 8 March-10 April 1980

1981

The Earthly Chimera and the Femme Fatale: Fear of Women in Nineteenth Century Art. The David and Alfred Smart Gallery, University of Chicago, Chicago, 20 May-21 June 1981

1986

Le Symbolisme et la femme. Mairie du IX^e arrondissement, Paris, 27 February-27 April 1986; Musée de Toulon, Toulon, 13 May-30 June 1986; Musée des Beaux-Arts, Pau, 4 July-24 August 1986; Fondation Septentrion, Marcq-en-Baroeul, 1 September-3 December 1986

Art Nouveau Bing: Paris Style 1900.

Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service, September 1986-September 1987

1990

Retrospective Georges de Feure. Tokyo, 25 July-12 August 1990; Osaka, 22 August-3 September 1990

Bibliography

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Léon Riotor, 'Le Salon de La Plume 2: Georges de Feure', *La Plume*, No. 81, September 1892, pp. 387-388

1893
 F. Vieilliard, 'Salon de la Rose+Croix', *L'Art littéraire*, Vol. II, No. 7, June 1893, p. 27

1894
 Anonymous, 'Aquarelles de M. Lefeuve' (sic), *L'Art français*, No. 362, 31 March 1894, unpaginated

Camille Mauclair, 'Chose d'art: exposition Georges de Feure', *Mercure de France*, May 1894, pp. 92-93

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Ian Millman

This catalogue is published to coincide with the exhibition *Georges de Feure, 1868-1943* at the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam from 26 November 1993 - 13 February 1994

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19th-century Masters

Naast aandacht voor Van Gogh en zijn tijdgenoten, richt het Van Gogh Museum zich ook in bredere zin op de internationale kunst uit de periode 1840-1914. Het presenteren van de serie '19de-eeuwse Meesters' past in deze opzet. Geen van deze kunstenaars wordt tot de grote meesters van de 19de eeuw gerekend, maar zij speelden elk op een eigen wijze een markante rol in het artistieke milieu van die tijd. Bovendien is hun oeuvre na hun dood niet of nauwelijks in monografische tentoonstellingen aan het publiek getoond. Met een selectie van de belangrijkste werken wordt een zo afgerond mogelijk beeld van deze kunstenaars geboden. Op deze manier krijgen hun werken de aandacht die ze verdienen en wordt tevens een completer beeld van de verschillende kunststromingen in de 19de eeuw gegeven.

In deze serie verschijnen:

- 1 Philippe Rousseau
- 2 Louis Welden Hawkins
- 3 Félix Bracquemond
- 4 Georges de Feure

While focusing on Van Gogh and his contemporaries, the Van Gogh Museum also takes a wider interest in international art from the period 1840-1914. Presenting the series of '19th-century Masters' conforms with this aim. None of these artists is regarded as a great master of the 19th century, but each in his own way played a striking role in the artistic milieu of the time. Since their death, their work has hardly if ever been shown to the public in solo exhibitions. With a selection from their most important work, the Van Gogh Museum aims to provide the most complete picture possible of these artists. In this way their work receives the attention it deserves and a more complete picture is given of the different artistic trends in the 19th century.

In the same series:

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- 2 Louis Welden Hawkins
- 3 Félix Bracquemond
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